





あさのハジメ
illustration
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Chapter 1: Sakamachi Kureha

“Things have turned wild, haven’t they Jirou-kun.”

Inside the newly-built Sakamachi Household, surrounded by the new and fresh scent of wood, the girl—Suzutsuki Kanade—spoke up. She’s the single daughter of Private Rouran Academy’s board chairman, a perfect rich and noble lady. At the same time, she was Konoe Subaru’s—the girl I proposed to—master.

“Even I was surprised at that. To think you’d propose in front of the entire student body.” Suzutsuki said with a somewhat serious tone.

She’s right, today at the opening ceremony, I proposed to Konoe, because she had decided to give up on her dream...namely to be a butler for the Suzutsuki Family...because she accepted my confession. That’s why I said I would become a butler of the Suzutsuki Family in her stead...

“But, my lady, is this really okay? We just went home early from school...” A familiar alto voice spoke up next to me.

Naturally, this voice belonged to none other than Konoe Subaru. She’s the crossdressing butler of the Suzutsuki Family...or wait, no. She declared that she’s a girl in front of the entire student body, so that’s not the case anymore. On a side note, it was currently 11am in the morning.

After the incident at the opening ceremony, Suzutsuki pulled me and Konoe off the stage, and urged us to come to my home like this. At the same time, Masamune isn’t here either. According to what Suzutsuki told me, she went home right after the ceremony. She’s probably at her flat right now...

“Can you blame me? The plan was for homeroom to happen after the ceremony, and then we could go home. But, if you two participated in homeroom, it’d cause a ruckus.”

“Well, you’re not wrong...” Konoe nodded, sounding nervous.

I can't blame her. Today, she nodded to my words, and declared that she'd quit as Suzutsuki's butler. However, that is simply her opinion. I still have to hear my answer.

"—Suzutsuki." I called out her name. "Please, tell me. Will you make me your butler?"

"....."

Silence followed, as I simply waited for her response.

"No can do. There's no way I can accept that."

".....!" I swallowed my breath at that response.

But, I guess this response was to be expected. A butler is a special existence for Suzutsuki, and although we may be friends, there's no way she could just...

"I mean, if you became my family's butler...Everything would be boring, right?"

"...Excuse me?"

"Think about it. If you were to become my butler, that would mean you'd go and get married to Subaru, right? In other words, you would marry into her family. Then, your name would change from Sakamachi Kinjirou to Konoe Kinjirou."

"....."

Now hold on. This is the reason she doesn't want me to become her butler...?

"And then, I can't make fun of you for being a 'Chicken' anymore."

"Are you kidding me!? What a stupid reason!"

"What are you talking about? With you changing your name and losing the 'Chicken', you'll lose your entire identity."

"My identity isn't that shallow!"

“Really? Sakama Chicken Jirou-kun.”

“Don’t emphasize it that way!” I was gasping for air, throwing retorts out like a boxing champion.

However, Suzutsuki simply let out a snicker, as she watched my reactions.

“Well, leaving aside the jokes...as a daughter of the Suzutsuki Family, I shall accept you as my butler.”

“! R-Really!?”

“Of course. You are my friend after all, so I’d be happy to have you as my butler.” She said, and smiled.

...Ahh, I was such an idiot. I guess I’ve been wrong about Suzutsuki this entire time. She might be a sadist, but when her friends are in a pinch, she definitely goes to help them. In the end, she’s just a gentle girl with a somewhat twisted personality.

“That sounds much more interesting to me after all.”

“.....”

“Rather, why did I never come up with that before? If I had Jirou-kun as my butler...I could play with him 24/7...How could I have been so blind to that possibility...What a failure on my part.”

“.....”

Let me take it back, she’s a devil after all—Devil Suzutsuki. It seems like she’s seeing me as a toy more than a butler. Ahaha, will my life be okay, I wonder? I feel like I’ll be used as a dust cloth or less.

“Jirou-kun, could you stop glaring at my face with such a scary expression? We wouldn’t want any tears.”

“Stop lying, you wouldn’t cry from something like this.”

“? You say some weird stuff. The one who will be crying is you, Jirou-kun.”

“Why!?”

“If you give me such rebellious gazes...I-It makes me want to bully you.”

“No matter how embarrassed you may try to act, you still sound scary!”

“Fufu, what’s the big deal? You rejected my confession, so at least give me this much.”

“...!” I swallowed my breath.

That’s right, with my declaration during today’s entrance ceremony, I basically gave Suzutsuki a response. After all, I proposed to Konoe. In other words...

“But...thanks to that, I feel refreshed.”

“...Eh?”

“I mean, the best I can do is give up, right? I didn’t expect you to propose in front of the entire student body. If you do something so bold for Subaru, I can only give up on you.”

“Suzutsuki...”

“Fufu, don’t give me such an apologetic gaze. What you did was the right choice. At the very least, that’s what I think. After all, I like all those honest parts about you. Subaru, you should be happy.”
Suzutsuki called out to Konoe, who had her face cast down.

“My lady...”

“Subaru, stop calling me that way. You revealed your true sex to everyone in front of the school today. That’s why, you’re not my butler anymore. Simply call me ‘Kana-chan’.”

“...Ah.” Konoe’s head shot up. “...Yeah, sorry, Kana-chan.”

“Don’t apologize. We’re still friends, okay?”

“...Thank you, Kana-chan.”

“Fufu, likewise. Thanks for calling me Kana-chan, Subaru.”

They both smiled at each other...I'm glad. I was worried that their friendship would break apart because Konoe accepted my confession. Before being master and butler, these two are meant to be friends after all.

“By the way, Subaru, there is one thing I'd like to tell you.”

“Hm? What is it?” Konoe tilted her head like a small animal, seeming confused.

Suzutsuki went silent for a moment, and then spoke up with a smile.

“Why are you and Jirou-kun not flirting around?”

“.....”

Now hold on a second. What is this woman talking about, completely out of the blue?

“K-Kana-chan? Um, I don't think I can quite follow...”

“You don't have to hold back, you know? You and Jirou-kun have become a fully-fledged couple, so you should be a lot more lovey-dovey.”

“B-But, even if you suddenly tell me that...” Subaru-sama blushed furiously.

I don't blame her. Suzutsuki is a bit more open about that sort of stuff. She's forgetting that she can't flirt around with me in front of somebody else...

“Please, Subaru, this is for my sake, so that I get over my feelings for Jirou-kun.”

“Eh...”

“I said what I said before, but...I'm still a girl. I might just never be

able to get over Jirou-kun. That's why, if I see you two acting like lovers, I can put a clean end to my feelings."

"Kana-chan..." Konoe put one hand on her chest. "...Okay. For your sake, I'll be lovey-dovey with Jirou!"

"Fufu, that's the Subaru I know and love. Thank you."

Konoe suddenly sounded awfully motivated, but Suzutsuki was showing an eerie grin...This is bad. That Suzutsuki, she's clearly enjoying this situation, yeah. She just wants to sit at the front line and see me and Konoe embarrassed. Enjoying herself is her utmost priority in life after all.

"Hey, Suzutsuki, you keep it down a bit."

"My, that hurts. I was just rejected, you know?"

"Urk...You love bringing that up, huh..."

"Fufu. Also, you'll become my butler, right? Then, you have to listen to my orders." She said, showing an angelic and innocent smile.

Ugh...I don't want to admit it, but her smile really is adorable. With just that, I don't think I could go against any kind of order she'd give me...

"Now then, it's lovey-dovey time~" She kept up her smile, and... "I say we start with a kiss."

"....."

Oh lord, I beg you, please somebody stop this woman. If not, Konoe and I will suffer at the hands of this woman. I mean...a kiss, you know? Doing that in front of Suzutsuki is...

"O-Okay, Kana-chan."

"!?"

Hearing that voice from next to me completely robbed me of my words. Looking over, Konoe's facial expression was distorted in

embarrassment, and stared at me.

“Calm down, Konoe! Don’t fall for her tricks!”

“Hmpf, that’s not the case. She’s doing this for our sake, I’m sure. Not to mention...” She blushed, and continued. “Do you...not want to kiss me?”

“.....”

Crap. My girlfriend is way too cute. Waaaah, I can’t say no with that face of hers! It’s killing me softly!

“...Jirou.” She muttered my name, and put her hand on my shoulder.

And then—

“—Mmn.”

Together with an adorable **kiss** sound, soft lips touched...my cheek.

“.....”



...Yeah, I guessed as much. I mean, a kiss on the cheek is already more than enough to get my heart racing, and I could feel my face heating up.

“~~~!”

Konoe seemed to suffer from similar feelings, as she jumped away from me, pressing one hand on her lips as she blushed furiously.

But...I wonder why...this reaction made her look even more girly...

“...Alright, well done you two.” Suzutsuki spoke up in the face of us flustered two.

A bit of regret and pain hid in her voice...Well, that's to be expected. After all, Suzutsuki had feelings for me, so surely she'd be down seeing me flirting with another girl.

“I'm sorry, my camera didn't capture that too well, so can I ask for another one?”

“What do you mean by camera!?”

When I turned my gaze towards Suzutsuki, I saw a lens pointed at us.....Don't tell me...

“Of course, I went ahead and took pictures of your lovey-dovey scene.”

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Oh my, why are you screaming like that? Since you're lovers, you should just indulge in that as much as you want. See, like this.”

“Stop! Don't show me such embarrassing pictures!”

She pointed the camera screen at me, showing me that cheek kiss scene. I-Is she Satan reborn? To think I'd be forced through such humiliation...My heart is going to run out of boost at this rate...

“K-Kana-chan, you don't have to take pictures...!”

Konoe seemingly felt the same way as me, as she blushed even more aggressively.

“Kyaaa, you're both blushing. So cute~”

“Shut up! It's because you're going around taking pictures!”

“You're wrong. This isn't a picture, it's a video.”

“You're making movies!?”

“Of course? Ahh, that is some wonderful material. I’ll play it on my TV once I get home.”

“U-Um...Kana-chan...that’s a bit too embarrassing...”

“It’s fine, I’ll show it to you later, Subaru.”

“Eh!? Seriously!?”

“Fufu, you really are adorable. Getting this happy.”

“~~~! Y-You’re wrong, I wasn’t really...”

“Come on, don’t try to act strong. The way you asked ‘Do you not want to kiss me?’ was adorable...”

“Waaaaaaah! Stop! No more, Kana-chan!” Subaru-sama aggressively flapped her arms up and down.

...Yeah, Suzutsuki is clearly playing around. Or rather, will this happen every single day once I’ve become her butler? What power harassment that is.

“Well, what I’m trying to say is that you two should be happy, since you’re lovers now. Don’t hold back, okay? When you’re happy, I’m happy.”

“...Suzutsuki.”

Maybe she’s just trying to be considerate of us...And that’s why she gave us that order. So that Konoe and I would be able to act as lovers even in front of her.

“...Thanks, Suzutsuki.”

“You don’t need to thank me. More importantly, you better make Subaru happy, okay. Still to think the day would come where that Subaru goes off to get married...Ahh, I can’t stop my tears...”

“You her Dad on marriage day or something?”

“When she was still a child, she said ‘Once I become an adult, I’ll

definitely marry Kana-chan!', as she assaulted me..."

"K-Kana-chan! I never said that!"

"Really now? Well, anyway." Suzutsuki gave me a serious gaze.
"Jirou-kun, you'll become my butler, right."

"I know that. Or rather...are you sure? I mean, you're the only daughter of the Suzutsuki Family, but can you really decide that on your own?"

"Well, not just on the spot. I probably will have to explain it to the family head, namely my father, and the other servants...but there might be someone disagreeing..."

"Are you talking about..."

"Yeah, Konoe Nagare. In fact, he's the highest-ranking servant, and Subaru's father..."

"Oh right...he was an absolute helicopter parent..."

I guess receiving permission to date Konoe from that old fart will probably be a lot more difficult than becoming Suzutsuki's butler. Also, won't he just straight-up come kill me once he hears about my proposal?

"—It's fine."

There, Suzutsuki operated her phone again.

"Right now, I sent him the video I took of you two."

"!"

"Of course, explaining the entire incident at the opening ceremony today."

"!?"

"I titled the mail 'Steps to adulthood'."

"....."

...Um, Suzutsuki-san? Do you want to kill me?

“Don’t be so scared, okay. Things would have ended even worse if you or Subaru told him directly. Also, that way I can explain things much easier.”

“Well, you’re not wrong, but...is this really okay? I’m worried he might die because of the shock.”

After all, it’s a video of his beloved daughter kissing some guy on the cheek. There’s no more destructive scene he could witness. Not to mention that she leaked the whole proposal to him.

“Then, let me call him...Oh, it didn’t go through. Said he’s out of range.”

“Kana-chan, I think he might have destroyed his phone the second he saw the mail...”

“I see, that’s expected, I guess. You probably guessed it perfectly.”
Suzutsuki nodded.

No, this isn’t the time to be admiring father and daughter, okay. The one who’s going to suffer next after the phone will be me, right? Honestly, that old fart’s strong. I think only Mom would be able to win against him?

“Anyway, let’s wait for Nagare’s next move.”

“He’s surely going to come hunting me, right?”

“Fufu, you can’t die, okay. You’ll become my butler after all.”

“...I know, I know.”

That’s right, I have to become Suzutsuki’s butler. In order to continue Konoe’s dream...and in order to grant my own new dream.

“But, before that...Jirou-kun, let me tell you about the job of a butler.”

“The job of a butler?”

In other words, all the duties that Konoe previously took care of, huh. Since I've seen her serve Suzutsuki at school, I can somewhat guess what that job really is about. She's always been good at making tea, and since she overcame her fear of knives, Konoe improved her cooking skills as well. However...

"...What, Jirou? Why are you staring at me like that?" Konoe seemingly didn't like my gesture, as she pouted in a clearly spoiled mood.

I mean...when I think about butlers, they seem more like close-combat fighters than actual servants. Specifically, there's the butler knuckle, or 'End Of Earth' coming to mind. The very moment a butler has special techniques like that, I just know something's off. Maybe I have to learn stuff like that as well? I feel like my little sister would give me some good ideas.

"Rest assured, I am the single daughter of the Suzutsuki Family, so I can raise my servants just fine. Listen carefully, Jirou-kun. Your job as my butler..." She pointed at me with her slender finger. "Is to be lovey-dovey with your master."

"....."

I guess my first duty has been decided. Alright, I gotta take this lady to the hospital right away. And then, she should get checked out immediately, hopefully get some long-term treatment. Don't you worry, Suzutsuki, I'm going to take good care of you as a butler.

"Jirou-kun, are you thinking about something rude?"

"Of course not. I was just worried about your future, and my own future."

"So you were thinking something rude. I'm being serious about this, okay?"

"Then why the hell did you suddenly bring up something like that!?" I couldn't take it anymore, and threw in a sharp retort.

I mean, can you blame me? You're telling me, a butler, to be lovey-dovey with my master? There's no way I can accept such a duty...

“Hey, you agree with me right, Subaru.”

“.....!?”

The second Suzutsuki called out to her, Konoe froze up, and blushed furiously...Now hold on, what's that reaction about?

“R-Right, Konoe, can't you tell me? You're pretty much my predecessor.”

“~~~!”

I got curious and asked her, to which she bit her lip. And then, she looked at me with an uncertain gaze.

“...Apologies, Jirou, explaining the job of a butler...is too embarrassing, so I can't.”

“It's too embarrassing!?”

“B-Because...Kana-chan forced me to do all sorts of stuff...” She muttered while blushing.

...Stop. Please, drop those reactions. What kind of work have you been doing so far? Oh yeah, I heard stories about Konoe washing Suzutsuki or whatever...but was she forced to do something even more stimulating?

“Don't worry, it's not as crazy as you think it may be.”

“Sure. Also, just tell me, what orders have you forced on her so far?”

“Um...that's...Tehe~”

“Don't try to hide it with an innocent smile!”

“Come on, don't get so angry. What's it matter, Subaru was my butler, so I'm allowed to flirt around with her a bit, right?”

“Looking at Konoe's reaction, it certainly doesn't look like 'a bit' to me!”

Waahh, I'm terrified just thinking about it. Oh yeah, Suzutsuki's first

love was Konoe, right? To think she'd use her position for...No, calm down, Sakamachi Kinjirou. There's no way such a yuri development was going on behind the scenes...Probably.

"Now, you must have understood the duties as a butler, right?"

"Not in the slightest, no."

Also, now I'm even more confused. Just what does a butler do? I'm worried about my future path now. At this rate, I might just get stomach cramps on a daily basis.

"Sheesh, can't be helped then."

There, Suzutsuki stood up from her seat, and walked towards me.

"If so...then I'll teach you in even simpler terms. Of course, with my own body."

"....."

My instincts were telling me to run.

"—There~!" She let out a cute voice, and dove right towards me... Waaaaah! Why is she hugging me like that!?

"Y-You! Get away from me already!"

"Why?"

"I mean..."

"I'm teaching you about your job as a butler."

"How is this related to my job!?"

She's just treating me as a giant plush toy! Or, a hugging pillow with an anime character imprinted on it. There's no way that this is...

"But, I often hugged Subaru like this."

"Eh?"

“Sometimes we’d even sleep in the same bed.”

“In the same bed!?”

“D-D-D-Don’t get the wrong idea, Jirou! I didn’t do anything! Kana-chan just gave me a ‘Let’s sleep together like we did as small children’ order, so I couldn’t...”

“You’re right. But, your sleep talk was quite adorable back then.”

“...Sleep talk?”

“She was like ‘Ah...Kana-chan...You can’t...don’t touch me there...it’s embarrassing...!’, you know.”

“I-I-I never said that! I never talked in my sleep like that!” Konoe flapped her arms around wildly, denying those words.

That sight of hers looked so comically adorable, but...Yeah, this ain’t the time to think about that. I gotta push away this rich lady right now.

“My? Jirou-kun, has your gynophobia been cured completely?”

“!”

“I knew it. I thought it was weird. But, congratulations. With this, our long treatment program has come to an end...Ah, right, now that it’s gone, I have a present for you from your future master.”

“...A present?”

“—Squeeeeeeze~”

“Gaaaaaah!? Stop that! You’re gonna pop me like a balloon!”

A sweet scent drifted up my nose, and a soft marshmallow-like sensation pressed against my body, making my heart race. Not good, this present is too bad for my heart. I feel like my gynophobia might flare up again.

“Fufu, Jirou-kun~” She seemed to have figured out my feelings, as

she clung to me with a sweet voice.

...Deretsuki-san's no joke, as always. So I'll become her butler? And then, every single day would be like this. Ahaha, what is this job? I feel like you wouldn't find this on the dark web no matter how much you searched for it.

"...Hmpf." There, I heard a displeased voice.

Looking over, Konoe Subaru stared at me and Suzutsuki, and—

"!?"

Suddenly, Konoe also clung to me.

"K-Konoe! What are you doing!?" I asked her, flustered.

"B-Because..." She muttered. "You were flirting around with Kana-chan..."

"....."

My god, Subaru-sama is jealous. To think she'd react this way... Waah, she's so cute. The usually indifferent Subaru-sama is being assertive now.

"Subaru, are you jealous?"

"N-Not really, but...Jirou is my boyfriend, so..."

"You're right. But, I am Jirou-kun's master."

"Ah, Kana-chan, you're clinging to him again...!" Konoe said, and as if to fight back, she also clung to me more aggressively.

Like that, two girls were fighting for me.....Um, I don't mind the popularity, but could you stop this useless fighting? If not, my heart won't be able to take it. I'm getting dizzy already from my heart going crazy. Anybody is fine, just please save me...

"...Hm?"

There, as if my prayers had been answered, the doorbell rang. Seems

like somebody's here.

"My, it seems like we have a visitor. I guess it's time to put things on hold." Suzutsuki said, and moved away from my body.

Konoe also let out a disgruntled 'Hmpf...', and did the same.

"...Phew." Confirming that they had let go of me, I sighed in relief.

I'm saved...I don't know who it is, but I thank you. What perfect timing that was...But, I wonder who it is? I didn't plan for any guests today.

"...God, they're so annoying."

Again and again and again and again, that visitor pressed the doorbell like they were trying to annoy the residents. Must be some urgent business, I guess.

"Yes yes, I'm coming." I muttered, and put my hand on the doorknob.

Well, whoever it may be, it's definitely a lot better than my previous situation. They won't cling to me at least.

"!?"

However, I would quickly curse my naivety.

"Nyahaha! Been a while!"

The second I opened the door, an innocent and energetic voice rang out. At the same time, an impact shook me. The girl shooting towards me rammed its body into mine. Also, it had so much momentum, it felt like a tackle more than anything. However, I knew. There's only one person who would act with such hyper violence.

"I'm back, Nii-san!"

While my body was pushed backwards onto the ground, she raised a cheerful voice. That's right, this is Sakamachi Kureha. Surprisingly enough, my little sister now appeared. And according to my experience, it won't end with just a tackle.

“Wooooo! Nii-san, Nii-san, Nii-san! It’s been a while, so I’ll give you a big hug!”

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Receiving Kureha’s relentless bear hug, I let out a scream. Following that, I heard ominous cracks on my back.

“...Yeah.”

But, I wonder why. This isn’t so bad. Maybe it’s because I get to meet Kureha after such a long time? She’s been living with Nakuru for a month now, so I didn’t get to enjoy this kind of treatment for a while. Haha, thinking about it that way, this is no big thing at all. Kureha’s a cute one, so if she hugs me like that, I’m more than happy...

“Hey, Kureha, can you get away now? I get that you’re happy about our touching reunion, but I’m going to pass out soon here.”

“Wha!? You’re right! Nii-san! Pull yourself together!”

After a few seconds of Kureha shaking me, I finally came back to my senses....T-That was dangerous, I almost walked over a line I’m never allowed to cross...I think I was getting close to meeting my old man.

“Nyahaha, sorry about that, Nii-san. I just got a bit excited.”

“Don’t worry about it. My body has probably gotten stiff over the days...Also, you’re finally back, huh.”

“Yup! Our home’s back to normal after all!” She grinned, and once again clung to me.

Well, I don’t blame her for being excited. This house burned down back in September, so it’s been a while since we got to feel each other’s warmth in here. Also...without her around, this doesn’t feel like the Sakamachi Family.

“For crying out loud, the way you siblings show affection is messed up as always.” There, an anime voice sounding like it came out of the 2D world rang inside my ears.

When I pushed up my body, I spotted a girl even smaller than Kureha—Narumi Schrödinger. The vice club president of Rouran Academy's handicrafts club let out a sigh as she looked at us.

"S-Schrö-senpai, why are you here?"

"Huh? Don't give me that, you proposal bastard."

"Wha...what kind of mocking nickname is that?"

"Ahaha, you jumped up on stage at the opening ceremony, can't blame me for giving you a fitting name, right? That was one hell of a sight. Topic's been going around in every homeroom after the ceremony ended."

"Urk...Well, I guess that's to be expected..."

After all, the entire school found out that their prince Subaru-sama is actually a girl, and I went up and proposed to her. In front of all of them. There's no way it wouldn't blow up.

"...Kureha-chan?"

There, Konoe's voice rang out. She seemed to have come to check up on who the visitor was.

"K-Konoe-senpai..." There, Kureha showed clear tension in her voice.

...Well, I don't blame her. She's liked Konoe before, and after being rejected back in November, she's probably gotten over it, but...Sure is complicated alright, finding out that the boy you liked actually was a girl.

"...Ah, sorry, wrong way to address you."

"Hm?" Konoe tilted her head, confused.

There, Kureha took a deep breath, and...

"S...Subaru-oneechan!"

"....."

Alright, hold on now, my sister. Where the hell did that come from?"

"Hey, Kureha, that came outta nowhere."

"Eh? But...you and Konoe-senpai are going to get married, right? You proposed to her during the opening ceremony. That means she'll become my sister-in-law."

"But..."

"Isn't it fine? I always wanted an older sister!" She grinned, showing a V-sign. Amazing...Her positive attitude is on an entirely different level. Even though she had feelings for Konoe before...

"....."

No, that's not it. She was rejected back in November, and now it's January. Quite some time has passed since then...that's why Kureha managed to get up again.

'Once I get a bit of rest...I'll get up again. I'll start walking again!'

On the day she was rejected, these were the words she told me. She stayed true to it, and got over her shock of being rejected.

"Nya? What's wrong, Nii-san? Why are you staring at me like that?"

"I mean, I was just thinking...how strong you are."

"Nyahaha! Where did that come from! That's how we girls are!" She puffed out her chest in confidence.

Well, in her case, not only her heart is strong, but also her body. I was just turned into a punching bag all the time.

"But, I sure was surprised. To think Subaru-sama turned out to be a girl, and immediately gets a proposal from Nii-san."

"Well, I don't blame ya."

"Yup. Not to mention..."

For some reason, Kureha started blushing, fidgeting awkwardly.

“Since you proposed to her...that means you two are...d-dating, right?”

“.....”

...This is bad. Things suddenly got all awkward. I never knew that having someone from my family...not to mention my own little sister asking me about my relationship status.

“I-Isn’t that right, Subaru-oneechan?”

“Y-Yeah...Also, stop calling me that way, Kureha-chan. We still... haven’t gotten married yet.”

“I-I understand, Konoe-senpai.”

“Urk...”

For some reason, Konoe sounded a bit disappointed. Maybe she actually wanted to be called that way a bit longer? Well, she always wanted a younger sibling after all.

“By the way, Konoe-senpai, can I ask you something?”

“Eh? I don’t mind...” Konoe seemed somewhat confused.

However, Kureha showed no restraint as she continued.

“Konoe-senpai, what do you like about Nii-san?”

It sounded like heaven’s split. Hey now, hey now, what are you talking about so abruptly...How can she ask something so embarrassing out of nowhere?

“You’re right, I’m quite curious about that myself.”

“!”

Looking behind me, there stood Suzutsuki.

“S-Suzutsuki, you...!”

“What’s it matter? You two are going out already, and Kureha-chan is

your little sister. That's why, we're all curious. Don't you agree, Kureha-chan?"

"Yes! Since Konoe-senpai will be Nii-san's future wife, I'm very interested!" Kureha showed no hesitation.

...That damn Devil Suzutsuki, she's only pouring more gasoline into the fire. Or rather than that, she's firing an entire rocket into there. In fact, Konoe was blushing furiously, as she glared at Suzutsuki.

"Now, tell us, Konoe-senpai. What do you like about Nii-san?"

"Urk..." Konoe bit her lip, trying to bear the embarrassment. If this was the past Konoe right now, I don't think I'd be able to answer that question. However, she's changed. She's not lost her way anymore, thanks to everything that happened. Stacking these experiences, she's made it this far.

"...Alright, I'll say it then..."

She seemed to have made up her mind. Taking a deep breath, she suppressed her embarrassment, and spoke up—

"—Everything."

"....."

...Alright, maybe you changed a bit too much, Subaru-sama. She's grown even more than I thought she had. Look, even Suzutsuki doesn't know how to respond. Also, everything..."

E-Everything?"

"Yeah...I like...everything about Jirou."

"But...even he has flaws, you know? He can't get up in the morning, he can't cook, and there's nothing great about his body other than how sturdy it is..."

"Hey, Kureha, I'm standing right here."

"Ah, my bad, my bad. Then...Konoe-senpai. Nii-san is the greatest

chicken bastard that has ever walked on this earth, you know?"

"Are you even listening to me!?"

Blurting out something I'm conscious about...Yeah, I'm a chicken who can't win against his little sister...Though, I doubt there's anybody who could win against her.

"It's fine...Even that included, I like everything about Jirou."

"Konoe-senpai..."

"Not to mention...even I have flaws. That's why, we just have to accept each other's flaws, and live on together." Konoe said, still flustered.

Hearing all of that, Kureha nodded once.

"You're right. I think that's the best. Then, Konoe-senpai, please take care of Nii-san from now on."

"Ah...Yeah, likewise, Kureha-chan."

"If possible, I'd like for you two to have two children."

"Why'd you suddenly bring that up!?"

"I mean, since you two will get married...Kyaa~"

"D-D-Don't start blushing there! You're jumping the gun! Also, it's too early to talk about the number..."

"Then I want to decide on the names."

"...Names?"

"Hansen and Brody¹."

"Why would I use names from foreign wrestlers!?"

"Ehhh, I think they're cool! Konoe Hansen and Konoe Brody."

"Yeah, no thanks..."

“But, I do think that having two children would be the best, you know? Just like Nii-san and me. If you get two, they’ll be strong like us!”

“S-Siblings like Kureha-chan and Jirou...” Konoe muttered, and looked over at me and Kureha.

A few seconds passed, to which Konoe showed a tense smile, saying ‘A-Aha...I’ll think about it...’, clearly hiding her honest feelings... Well, I get how she must feel. Honestly speaking, I wouldn’t want children like me and Kureha. I mean, the older brother is being used as a punching bag, right? Only one victim is needed here.

“Ahhh, can I just break between you all?” An anime voice interrupted the conversation between Kureha and Konoe.

That voice naturally belonged to Schrö-senpai. She played with her hair, and then...

“Kureha, I told you before. We came here for a reason. Won’t you prioritize that?”

“Nya...R-Right, my bad, vice captain.” Kureha showed a somewhat dejected reaction.

What? Why is she acting like that. Also, the way she said ‘We’...

“Come in already, will you.” Schrö-senpai looked at the door.

Following that, a shadow appeared, taking the shape of a girl wearing glasses and cat ears—Narumi Nakuru. She’s Schrö-senpai’s younger sister, and the president of the ‘Watch Over Subaru-sama with a Warm Gaze’ committee.

“H-Hello, Subaru-sama.”

“Nakuru-chan...”

Tension filled the air...As expected, you could say. Today, Konoe announced that she’s a girl, despite being known as the prince of the school. At the same time, Nakuru was the leader of her fanclub. Or rather, her main goal was to create BL books with the two of us.

Either way, finding out that Konoe is a girl must be a huge shock for her. And, not everybody could be as positive about it as Kureha.

“...Subaru-sama.” With a serious expression, Nakuru spoke up. “You knew that two Subaru-sama fan clubs exist at Rouran Academy, right? The [S4] and the [Watch Over Committee]. Nakuru has come here...as a representative of both fanclubs.”

“...!” I swallowed my breath.

Basically...she came here to convey the opinions of both clubs? That would be bad. They all thought that Konoe was a girl...

“—It’s fine, Jirou.”

However, Konoe opened her mouth, almost like she had guessed what I was thinking.

“No need to be so worried. This is my problem, so I have to hear out Nakuru-chan.”

“Konoe...”

That’s right, we have to hear out Nakuru’s words, no matter what they may be. After all, they thought that Konoe was a girl.

“Nakuru-chan, tell me. I’m prepared.” She said, and looked directly at Nakuru.

She really...changed, huh. The previous Konoe never would have been able to do such a thing. No clue what Nakuru is about to say. Maybe she’s going to blame her. Maybe she’s going to reprimand her for acting like a boy. She might vent out her anger that she stored up. And yet, Konoe didn’t run away. She decided to face these problems.

“...Thank you very much, Subaru-sama.”

A heavy atmosphere reigned at the entrance. Nakuru opened her mouth. In that split second, I saw Konoe gulp down her saliva.

“—Please go on a date with Nakuru.”

Why...why is she the second person after Kureha who has gone batshit crazy today...Okay now hold on. What is this glasses junkie saying?

“U-Um...Nakuru-chan, what exactly do you mean by that?”

“That’s crystal clear! Nakuru wants to go on a date with Subaru-sama!”

“B-But, a date...” Subaru-sama was bewildered.

I don’t blame her. Nakuru came to meet her as the representative of both clubs, so she surely never would have imagined such a question. Not to mention, asking her out on a date...

“Hey now, Nakuru, you can’t just drop a bomb like that and not elaborate.” Schrö-senpai spoke up.

...Thank god, at least she knows how messy this is. Thanks to her I managed to get up after all. Surely, she should be able to get this situation under control.

“I mean, Subaru-sama is Onii-chan’s girlfriend, remember? If she went on a date with you, she’d practically be cheating.”

“.....”

For a moment, a horrible premonition filled my chest...I forgot. She might be a good and reliable person, but sometimes she goes a bit crazy. She’s a different kind of troublemaker compared to Suzutsuki.

“Fueh? But then, what should Nakuru do, Onee-chan?”

“Hehe.” Schrö-senpai let out a confident snort. “Ain’t that obvious? If a date between just you and Subaru-sama is a problem, then have someone tag along. In other words...” She said, and pointed at me.

“Onii-chan, you join them on their date.”

“Wha...why me!?”

“I mean, you two are going out, right? Perfect then, if the boyfriend

is present, it doesn't count as cheating."

"Y-You're not wrong, but..."

I don't think that Konoe would cheat on me with Nakuru. I mean... those two are girls...Ah, right. Until today, Nakuru thought that Konoe was a boy, yeah. But, didn't she enjoy the coupling with me and Subaru-sama more than invading that...

"With just Nakuru, Subaru-sama, and Onii-chan, it's a bit unbalanced, right." Narumi Schrödinger interrupted my thoughts.

The ultra small handicrafts vice club president dropped the third bombshell for today.

"That's why...I'll tag along."

"...Excuse me?"

"No 'excuse me', okay. I'm saying that I'll tag along. It'll be the four of us. Would give it a better balance, right? Basically, what I'm trying to say..." She smiled, and continued. "Let's go on a double date."

"....."

Yeah, I expected as much. Both Narumi Nakuru and Narumi Schrödinger are unpredictable.

1 Professional wrestlers

Chapter 2: Narumi Sisters

“Kyaaa! It looks wonderful on you, Subaru-sama!”

January 5th, perfectly 3.30pm at this very moment, Nakuru raised a scream inside a women’s clothes store near the train station. Standing in front of this glasses junkie was Konoe Subaru, wearing women’s clothing with her hair down, instead of her usual butler attire.

“N-Nakuru-chan, these clothes are cute alright, but it’s a bit embarrassing...”

“It’s fine! There’s no going wrong with Nakuru’s clothes coordination! It looks perfect!”

“R-Really...” Konoe showed a bashful smile.

She might just be happy that she gets to wear such feminine clothes. Since she had to act like a butler, she was forced to hide her true self, not getting to enjoy these kinds of clothes. On a side note, Kureha and Suzutsuki were currently at home. Or rather, Suzutsuki had no reason to stick around, so she went back to her residence.

“Hmm, having fun, huh?”

Watching their exchange was Schrö-senpai.

“These two might actually be a good match. Whatcha gonna do, Onii-chan? Subaru-sama might just get stolen away from you, right?”

“Please take this a bit more seriously. Also, why did you even bring up the idea of a double date?”

After that explosive statement at the entrance, Konoe and I were practically dragged along by the Narumi sisters, taken to the town. After eating some light lunch, we came to this place. And then, a one-person model show held by Subaru-sama started. Terrifyingly enough, Nakuru was pretty much using her as a dress-up doll for the past hour. Then again, if she’s having fun, then that’s all that matters.

“No biggie. It’s a fact that Nakuru wanted to meet Subaru-sama. Since it would have been awkward between the two, I figured that somebody would tag along.”

“That doesn’t mean...”

“Couldn’t help it, you’re Subaru-sama’s boyfriend. Also, you’re not alone, I’m here with ya.”

“Well, you’re not wrong.”

Still, I never would have imagined I’d be going on a date with the Schrö-senpai. I mean, not like you could really call this a date. We’re more like guardians to Konoe and Nakuru.

“Though, I have to say...” Schrö-senpai muttered. “Being on a date... sure makes me nervous.”

“.....”

Don’t tell me, this person...

“Schrö-senpai, is this your first date?”

“Wha...O-Of course nyat! I have a lot of experience, you know!?” She shouted like a kitten that had its food stolen from it.

No, I clearly hit bullseye with that, right? Look at how she’s blushing. Her reaction makes it so easy to understand.

“You don’t need to be so nervous. Leaving Konoe and Nakuru aside, we simply came to a clothes store.”

“W-Well, it sure doesn’t feel like much of a date...Hey, Onii-chan, what do you think would be typical for a date?”

“Eh? Holding hands while walking through town, eating lunch together, heading out somewhere...”

“Also, a princess carry.”

“Why a princess carry!?”

I never seen a couple doing that in the middle of town, you know!? That's like a SSR occurrence with a 0.0001% drop rate!

"Hmpf...But, that's what it said in Nakuru's novel. Well, the characters were Onii-chan and Subaru-sama."

"That's just some fake fiction Nakuru created..."

"Not to mention that Subaru-sama was carrying Onii-chan."

"Why am I the one getting carried!?"

"Huh? What are you talking about? Subaru-sama is the seme and you're the uke—"

"Stop! I don't want any detailed information about that!"

For a moment, I could see myself getting carried by Konoe. I immediately stopped my thought process, and cursed that damn glasses junkie. Using the fact that it's fiction to come up with her nonsensical scenarios. The princess position does not look good on me at all.

"That's why I thought that a princess carry would be template stuff for a date."

"That'd just be exhausting for the guy, right?"

"Hell no. Should I give you a princess carry?"

"....."

The ultra small Schrö-senpai is going to give me a princess carry... Waaah, it'd be such a surreal situation. Most terrifying is that she could probably actually pull it off.

"That being the case, give me a princess carry."

"Are you serious!?"

"Of course. It's fine, this much doesn't count as cheating I'm sure."

"P-Probably, but..."

“Or...do you not want to give me a princess carry?” Schrö-senpai looked up at me.

...This is bad. What kind of adorable animals is this? I’d probably come visit on a daily basis if she was in a zoo.

“T-Then, here we go.”

“Kya, so abruptly...Wait, Onii-chan, this isn’t a princess carry, right! You’re just lifting me up and down!”

“Ah, apologies. You’re just so small, I subconsciously...”

“D-D-Don’t call me small!” Schrödinger-san loudly complained.

However, that sight of hers only made her look more adorable...Wait, no. The employee was already giving me a dubious gaze. Maybe I went too far? And, lifting her up and down constantly sure is exhausting.

“I-I understand. I’ll put you down, so calm down.”

“Hmpf, as long as you understand it. I didn’t think I’d be treated like a child on my first date.”

“Ah, so it really was your first date.”

“...!? N-No, you misheard, I actually have lots of experience...”

“You don’t have to force yourself like that. Though, it’s a bit unexpected, I feel like you’d be popular.”

“Urk...I don’t know why, but the people in my class and from the club often tell me that...”

“Rather, it doesn’t make sense that you never dated anybody. Do you never get any confessions?”

After all, she’s the school’s strongest Schrödinger-san. Her personality might be a bit aggressive, but she’s like an adorable idol. Or rather, a mascot? Either way, I could see her getting lots of confessions.

“...Well, I got some before, but there was a problem, alright.”

“A problem?”

Schrö-senpai took a faint breath, and continued.

“All the peeps who confessed to me were girls.”

“.....”

“They said stuff like ‘I fell in love with Schrö-senpai’s admirable person!’ or ‘Please make me your younger sister!’ or ‘Won’t you become my hugging pillow for tonight!’...they were all abnormal confessions...”

“Must have been rough.” I gave a vague smile to the best of my ability.

...Schrödinger-san is no joke. To think she’d gather this much popularity from the girls. Yeah, she definitely is more admirable and cool than your average boy. That’s probably why nobody dared to approach her.

“Hehe, thanks to that, my student life has been grey and dull.”

“Grey? It sure sounds pink to me, getting confessed to left and right by girls.”

“S-S-S-Shut up! Doesn’t help me!”

“Ah, I’m sorry. But, I understand how you feel. Since I couldn’t hang around girls much, people got the wrong idea.”

“Ohhh! So we’re comrades.” Schrö-senpai’s face lit up.

Well, the reason people got the wrong idea is because of my gynophobia, I guess. But, since she doesn’t know about that, there’s no need to explain that. As long as I show that we’ve gone through similar things...

“Huh? But, you got Subaru-sama as a girlfriend, right?”

“.....”

Crap, I forgot about that.

“So wait, Onii-chan is actually one of those ‘normies’?”

“No, I’m not really that...”

“Ah, right, my bad.”

“Why were you so quick to accept that!?”

Damn it, just what is she thinking of me...Well, it’s true that I don’t have much going for me, so that does make sense. Even if I got myself a girlfriend now, trouble’s still gonna be around.

“Ahaha, don’t be so depressed about it. You still have a full year left in school, so just go and enjoy that.”

“Schrö-senpai...”

“Well, once you’re a third-year, you have your entrance exams to worry about. Since our school is also a bit more high-level than others, classes will be more strict.”

“.....”

Somebody tell me, is this person even trying to cheer me up? Or, is she just trying to make me feel more depressed? I can’t guess which way it is. Still...entrance exams, huh.

“That reminds me, you plan on studying overseas, right?”

“Hm? Yeah, I always wanted to go overseas. Well, I’m going to come back eventually.”

“Huh, is this connected to a dream of yours?”

“Hmm...part of it? Can you guess?”

“Eh?” I started thinking.

Schrö-senpai’s dream, huh...Thinking about professions fitting her,

it'd be a voice actress, working as a salesperson in a department store while wearing a giant costume...or maybe a dancing and singing idol...that's the kind of image I have. Because of her anime voice, that's just how I keep imagining her.

"Hehe, doesn't seem like you know, so let me tell you. My dream...is to become a teacher."

"Eh...a school teacher?"

"Yup. My first step would be to become a teacher at Rouran Academy." Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

Woah, that sure surprised me. Knowing her, I figured she'd want to become the strongest individual on the entire planet, something that my little sister would bring up, but...a teacher? I was thinking that teacher attire would look good on Masamune before, but she might not be that bad either. It is very much like Schrö-senpai. She has these leadership tendencies, and I bet the students would like her.

"Of course, once I become a teacher, I'm going to raise strong students."

"....."

"For that, I'll first become the advisor of the handicrafts club. Then, I'll give them spartan survival of the fittest training. Sounds fun, right?"

"Y-Yes, well..."

Emergency. I need to report Schrö-senpai's plan to the board of education as quickly as possible. If not, our school will be turned into some kind of military base, and they'll turn the handicrafts club into a SWAT unit.

"For that, I'm going to gather experience overseas."

"W-Well, whatever your goal may be, I think it's good to have gathered as much experience as possible."

"Oh, thanks! And, today's double date might be a good experience as

well.”

“Eh?”

When I returned a question, Schrö-senpai blushed ever so slightly.

“I mean, going on a date with a boy...t-this is my first time.”

“.....”

What the hell. She’s way too cute, my god. The sight of hers being flustered is hitting right where it hurts. If she were my teacher, I’d listen to whatever she tells me. Or rather, I’d attend school once more, and join the handicrafts club.



“...J-Jirou.”

There, I heard Konoe’s voice. Did she and Nakuru finish their fashion show?

“...!?”

With these thoughts, I turned around, only to freeze up—It’s

Takanashi Punyuru. The person right in front of me was not Konoe Subaru anymore, but rather the fake character created by that sadistic rich lady. Put simply, she's basically Subaru-sama in girl mode wearing glasses.

"H-How does this look? I had Nakuru-chan choose some clothes for me..." She fidgeted awkwardly, throwing glances at me.

She wore green, stylish glasses, together with a goth lolita type dress with lots of frills everywhere, which created a completely different atmosphere from the usual...Waaah, what the hell is this? The gap to her usual male clothes really hit close to home.



“Fufu, how’s this, Senpai?” The glasses junkie showed a confident grin, showing her face from behind Konoe. Not bad, glasses junkie. Just for today, I’ll praise you.

“Ah, Senpai, has your image of Nakuru changed a bit?”

“Tch, I’m surprised you could tell.”

“Of course Nakuru can tell. Your glasses today are shining with newfound respect for Nakuru.”

“...My bad, I feel like that’s just made up nonsense.”

What’s that supposed to mean? Normally, it’d be my eyes, right? Well, leaving that aside...

“Um...Konoe...it looks great on you.”

“~~~!”

When I gave her my honest impression while blushing furiously, Punyuru aka Konoe simply responded with a meek ‘T-Thanks’. Waaaah, what kind of atmosphere is this...Being flustered after being praised is so adorable on Konoe’s end, but it just makes things more embarrassing for me. Right now, I want Suzutsuki’s poker face. I desperately need to hide my blushing face.

“Waaah, look at that, Nakuru! Those two are as red as ripe apples!”

“Urk...Even though Nakuru went all out, all he has eyes for is Subaru-sama.”

From a distant place, I heard the comments of the Narumi sisters. D-Damn it...since what they’re saying is absolutely true, I can’t argue against it...I mean, the Konoe right in front of me at this very moment is simply a cute girl. That’s right, she’s not a crossdressing butler anymore.

“But...with this, Nakuru can finally accept it.” While saying that, Nakuru looked over at Konoe. “Subaru-sama really is a girl.”

“.....”

All of us just went silent. That’s right, Konoe Subaru undoubtedly is a girl. However, she kept that fact hidden to everyone at school. That’s why, Nakuru probably isn’t the only one bewildered at this sudden revelation.

“Alright, Nakuru thinks we should leave now. Subaru-sama, are you going to buy these clothes?”

“Ah...Yeah, since you went out of your way to choose them for me.”

“Ehehe, thank you very much, Subaru-sama.” Nakuru smiled, as her cat ears swayed left and right.

However, her voice sounded a bit lonely for some reason.

♀ × ♂

After we left the clothes shop, we immediately headed straight back home. It was a bit short for a date, but since classes start tomorrow, we don't have the time to play around. And with that, it's now 5pm. Right now, we were present at the gigantic Narumi Residence.

“Sorry about this, Onii-chan and Subaru-sama, sending us off like that.”

“Well, it was a date on paper, so that's the least we can do.”

As the sky was colored with the setting sun, I gave Schrö-senpai these words. However, we didn't just come here to send them off.

“U-Um...” Standing in front of the imposing gate, Nakuru seemed like she wanted to say something.

Indeed, we came here for her sake. She probably asked for this date in order to tell Konoe something. That's at least how it seemed. And Konoe probably felt that as well. That's why we came all the way out here. So that we could hear her out.

“...Nakuru-chan.” Konoe called out to the silent Nakuru, having changed back into her butler's clothes.

In her hand, she had a plastic bag containing the clothes she just bought.

“.....” She looked at Nakuru, and... “.....I'm sorry.” She said, simply apologizing. “The reason I acted like a boy at school is so that I could continue being a butler at the Suzutsuki family. I wanted to be her butler no matter what. That's why I've been lying this entire time.”

“.....”

“But...in the end, I was simply deceiving everyone. Everybody thought I was a boy, and even made a fanclub...”

“...Subaru-sama.”

“Yet...I betrayed all of you...Even though you supported me...So, I’m sorry.” Konoe lowered her head.

Honestly, I couldn’t bear to watch this. It’s not like Konoe did anything wrong, she simply did everyone for the sake of her dream. However...as a result, she became the prince of the entire school.

“.....”

Maybe Konoe was feeling guilty the entire time. About the fact that she’s deceiving everyone, and that she’s actually a girl. That’s why she’s apologizing to Nakuru so earnestly...

“—It’s fine, Subaru-sama.”

Suddenly, a comforting voice rang out. This voice belonged to Nakuru, no doubt. Even though she was the president of the Subaru-sama fanclub, she simply smiled.

“It’s true that...finding out about your secret was a shock. However, Nakuru figured that you were acting like a boy for a special reason.”

“Eh...”

“Nakuru is your fan, remember? You wouldn’t deceive us other students for no reason, that much she can say.”

“Nakuru-chan...” Konoe slowly raised her head.

Her eyes looked a bit wet. I guess that’s to be expected. She must have been scared. Worried that she would receive blame for crossdressing like that. And even so, she apologized without running away. The past her surely wouldn’t have been able to do that. She was scared, and still faced Nakuru. That surely must have gone through as well...

“However...Nakuru has one request for Subaru-sama.” She suddenly

said.

And then, with a serious expression—

“Won’t you let Nakuru and the others continue the [Watch over Committee]?”

“...What?”

With that, my voice overlapped with Konoe’s. She wants to continue the [Watch over Committee]? What is she saying? Konoe’s a girl, right?

“...No problem at all.” Nakuru strongly declared. “Nakuru and the others will just keep Subaru-sama as a boy in their hearts.”

“...Oi, Nakuru, what’s that supposed to mean?”

“It’s simple, Senpai. Nakuru and the others will continue to create BL material between Subaru-sama and Senpai. It’s the 2D world, so everything is possible.”

“Wha...!?” I was at a loss for words.

...So basically...they’re going to treat Konoe as a boy in the 2D world, despite her being a girl in the 3D world.

“But, will everyone be fine with that?”

“Of course. Or rather, everything’s already been crumbling since the Suzutsuki Revolution. All because of the declaration that you were dating Suzutsuki-senpai.”

“Oh yeah, that caused a big ruckus, huh.”

“And, adding the incident today at the opening ceremony, it’s pretty clear that everyone’s out cold. In other words...” Nakuru said, as her glasses gave off an ominous shine. “We have no interest in 3D.”

“.....”

“That’s why we will continue our work! In 2D everything is fair

game! We can make Subaru-sama a male character! Ahhh, what a free world this is! There is nothing more wonderful!” The glasses junkie declared as she opened up her arms towards the sky.

...Hot dang, how strong can she be? In a sense, she’s much more positive than Kureha. To think she’d accept the reality of Subaru-sama being a girl in such a way.

“.....”

However, I’m pretty sure that the Suzutsuki Revolution back in November surely helped her accept that Konoe is a girl. Back then, both fanclubs were on the verge of destruction. In a way, this incident now was simply the last straw which led them...the [Watch over Committee]...to choose 2D over 3D.

“But, are you sure? The [Watch over Committee] might have chosen 2D now, but the [S4] are different, right?”

“No need to worry. As of today [S4] has disbanded.”

“D-Disbanded...”

“And, a new [S4] has emerged.”

“Huuuuh!?”

I-I can’t follow at all...What is going on? A new [S4]? But, Konoe turned out to be a girl, right?

“However, the activities and mentality of the new [S4] are a bit different.”

“Different?”

“Basically, they are still supporting Subaru-sama as an idol...even if she’s a girl.”

“.....”

Um...So basically...

“Put bluntly, it’s yuri time.”

“Could you maybe choose your words!?”

“Would you have preferred Nakuru to say lesbian?”

“That makes it even more blunt!”

“Well, leaving aside whatever you’d like to call it, the [S4] has shifted into that territory, so if you aren’t careful, Subaru-sama will be stolen from you, you know?”

“.....”

Will our school be okay? I heard that a large number of [S4] members were girls, but does that mean that they all woke up to that kind of interest? Not to mention because I confessed to Konoe? Phew, I feel like I did something I shouldn’t have.

“More than anything, Subaru-sama always had feminine looks, so wearing that girls’ uniform won over a lot of girls, you know?”

“Oh yeah, because she’s always been male clothes.”

Thinking about it, when I first saw Konoe looking like an actual girl, I remember being shocked myself. Honestly speaking, the way she has her hair down is so adorable.

“With today’s incident, Nakuru and the others once again realized the influence Subaru-sama has. Although it was after the Suzutsuki Revolution...To think that so many girls would awaken to such a peculiar interest just because of today...”

“This is bad. Birth rates are gonna decrease even more...”

“Eh? Shouldn’t that be fine? With the progress we’re making, one day even members of the same sex should be able to make babies!”

“...Sorry, Nakuru, I guess you’re the most abnormal one in the group.”

“Hmpf, that’s not true. By the way, Nakuru wishes the most for a

reverse LASIK operation. With everybody's eyes getting worse, more and more people will wear glasses."

"Rather than that, maybe you should get your head checked out."

Also, before getting some reverse LASIK operation, why not just wear fake glasses instead? I guess that glasses junkie might have something against that.

"Well...either way, what Nakuru wants to say...is that you don't have to worry that much, Subaru-sama. Things won't be able to stay the same way as before, but...We will enjoy our student lives our own way."

".....Yeah. Thanks, Nakuru-chan." Konoe seemingly was relieved, as she thanked Nakuru with teary eyes.

...Thank god. She should be fine attending school even now that everybody found out that she's a girl. Just as Nakuru said, things won't be able to stay the same way as before, but Konoe and the students should be capable of accepting this new situation.

"How do I say this...girls can be pretty strong, huh."

"Hm? You only realized that now, Onii-chan?" Schrö-senpai showed me a grin, as she looked up at me. "Not that big of a shock, you know? Doesn't matter if it's boys or girls, there's times when life won't go our way. In this case, the prince of the school turned out to be a girl. That's just how life works."

"Well, that's right."

"Honestly speaking, this world is just full of nonsensical stuff like that. Can never tell what's gonna happen next. What's important is that you don't give up. Everybody's going through that, but it's hard to recover."

"....."

Everybody is going through that...huh. Yeah, it's probably just as Schrö-senpai said. Naive thinking of 'I'm fine if it's just me' won't get you anywhere. One day, a breakdown will happen. What's important

is that you get up again. After all, life doesn't end there. It sounds so simple, yet not everybody can do it. We're no different, that's why...

"That's why." While the sky was colored in a strong orange, Schrö-senpai spoke up. "The best we can do is live on to the best of our ability, right? Break our legs, crawl along the ground, no matter what it takes—we gotta enjoy life." She said, and smiled.

That smile of hers looked like the dazzling sun so bright.

"Schrö-senpai, you sounded like a teacher just now."

"Oh, seriously!?"

"Well, a bit clumsy, but it worked, I guess."

"~~~! S-S-Shut up! Who cares if it was clumsy! As long as the students understand what I'm talking about!" Schrödinger-san screamed in embarrassment.

Next to her, Nakuru showed a joyful smile.

"Now then, Senpai and Subaru-sama, thank you very much for the date today!"

"I didn't do anything big. Also, you really never run out of energy, huh."

"Naturally. That is who Nakuru is. Also...You do your best, Senpai. Becoming a butler at the Suzutsuki Family sounds rough."

"Yeah, I'm gonna see where it takes me."

"Nakuru wishes for you two to be happy. Becoming Senpai's lover might be impossible...but Nakuru likes both Senpai and Subaru-sama."

"Nakuru..."

"O Lord, please grant these lost sheep a glasses blessing."

"Stop with the weird prayer!"

“Nakuru shall prepare wedding glasses for the wedding ceremony!”

“What even are wedding glasses!?”

“Of course, glasses made to celebrate something.”

“There’s nothing that should be celebrated with glasses!” I threw in consecutive retorts.

For crying out loud, she’s always been crazy since the day we met. That’s a glasses junkie for you. I wish I could live at my own pace like she does. I’m just hoping that she doesn’t go overboard.

“Alright, you two. Time to say goodbye. I’m expecting some juicy reports next time. Also, don’t forget to call us to your wedding ceremony, we’ll blow the place up.” Giving her farewells, Schrö-senpai walked through the gate, entering the residence.

As if to chase after that small back, Nakuru screamed ‘Ah, wait a second, Onee-chan!’, and walked after her.



“.....”

With that, the double date with the Narumi sisters ended. The sky was colored crimson red, as Konoe and I looked after the two.

♀ × ♂

“What should we do, Konoe? You going back to the residence?”

On our way back from the Nakuru household, I asked Konoe who walked next to me.

“Yep. I’ll do that. I think Kana-chan should be home by now. Not to mention that I have to explain everything to the others.”

“...Will you be okay? I can tag along.”

I couldn’t help but feel apologetic. After all, she would be quitting her work as a butler because of me. That’s why, I should probably...

“—It’s fine.”

However, Konoe said that.

“I...I will explain everything. It’s my decision after all, so I have to carry the responsibility.”

“.....” After a brief silence, I spoke up. “Got it.” I nodded.

Right now, she should be fine. She can take responsibility for her own actions. And, if doing it alone won’t work out for her, she’ll surely come asking me for help. That’s why I also...

“Hm?”

Suddenly, I heard a faint electronic melody coming from my phone. I took it out and checked the display, seeing that I had received mail. Its contents said...

“...Sorry, Konoe. Something urgent came up, so I gotta leave early.” I stuffed my phone into my pocket.

In return, Konoe must have sensed what was going on, and said ‘Okay, be careful’.

“See you tomorrow at school.” I said, and started running.

It was currently 6pm in the evening, and I was heading my way to Rouran Academy. After all—she is waiting: Usami Masamune, the girl who has feelings for me.

Chapter 3: Usami Masamune

Atop the rooftop of the second classroom building our Rouran Academy had, there she stood, illuminated by the starry night.

“...Sorry, I made you wait.”

When I called out to her after opening the door, she responded with a brief ‘Don’t be, I called you here after all’. She possessed a slender figure with strong, confident eyes, twintails that shook in the evening breeze, as she wore Rouran Academy’s girls’ uniform—Usami Masamune.

The mail she sent me asked me to come here to this place. In fact, this location has a special meaning for the both of us. During the school festival last year, because of various circumstances, Masamune and I acted like lovers, and came up here. And then, she said—

‘...I want to change!’

“.....”

Thinking about it, Masamune sure was cold and distant back then. All because she couldn’t trust other people. Since she was raised in a difficult family environment, she grew up like that. However, through our combined efforts, and because of the time she spent with everyone at the club, she changed. Or more accurately, she managed to change. And then...

“.....”

She confessed to me. However, I...

“—Stupid chicken.”

Almost like she guessed what I had been thinking, Masamune called out my name.

“Would you mind hearing me out for a bit?”

“—Yeah.” I gave her an immediate answer.

In response to that, Masamune showed a proud ‘Hehe’ reaction.

“I managed to settle things.” She said, and showed me a V-sign.

.....Um, Masamune-san? I have no idea what you’re talking about, but what exactly might you be referring to?

“Ah, sorry, I should probably explain myself.”

“Of course? Also, where did you go after the opening ceremony? I was worried about you.”

“...Sorry, I remembered that I had something to take care of.”

“Some business?”

“Yeah. Seeing you propose to Subaru-sama made me feel like I couldn’t just sit around and do nothing.” Beneath the winter sky, she continued with a somewhat serious tone. “The thing is...after the opening ceremony ended, I went...to my parents’ place.”

“Wha...” I was at a loss for words.

I mean, hasn’t she already cut her ties with her family? I still can’t forget that Christmas Eve. That day, she called her parents to her previous home in order to have a final conversation. However, her parents fully ignored her. They didn’t even listen to her daughter’s request, and didn’t even come to meet her. They still acted on the idea of laissez-faire. It sounded simple enough with words alone, but the emotion behind it was all too cold. Despite that, Masamune didn’t back down.

‘It’s true that I wanted to meet them, but I can also say my final farewell with a mail.’

If my memory serves me right, that’s what she told me with a strong smile. So why...

“Well, it’s simple. I just thought...that doing it via a message wasn’t good enough. Of course, it would have been easier with just that.

But...our problem wasn't simple enough. I really thought that saying it to their faces would be the best."

"....."

"By the way, you made me feel that way, you know? It surprised me, really. Proposing in front of the entire school...But, your honest feelings back then, I realized. 'Ahh, I really have to tell them with my own words', you know. That's why...Thank you. Because of you, I managed to take an important step forward."

"....."

A brief silence reigned, but it was only like a breeze passing us by.

"...No." I declared. "I should be the one thanking you."

"...Eh?"

"Don't you remember? When Konoe revealed her secret to the school, I couldn't do anything. Yet, you pushed my back, saying 'Are you really fine with this?', remember?"

"....."

"Because of you...I managed to make up my mind, and managed to take a step forward. I could tell Konoe my feelings in front of the entire school...That's why, thank you, Masamune."

"....." Masamune stayed silent for a moment. "...Dummy. I'm not happy about hearing that." She blushed ever so slightly.

Whatever she says, it's the truth. It's thanks to her, who was basically like my family at this point.

"But, how did you manage to meet your parents? They didn't show up during Christmas, right?"

That left me confused even now. Judging from what I heard, her parents seemed to avoid meeting her...

"Huh? That was easy enough." For some reason, Masamune sounded

awfully proud. "I raided them."

".....Wat?"

Hearing those words from the girl I thought to be family, my brain lagged for a second.

"As I said, I raided them."

"...E-Ehm, huh?"

"Since they didn't show any signs of meeting me, I made my way to them. I'm shocked it never occurred to me until now."

"....."

...Scary. Is she part of some SWAT team?

"Well, after the opening ceremony ended, I went to their workplaces."

"...You..."

"Don't worry, I properly contacted them before, saying 'I'm coming over to you right now, so wait for me'."

"Ahh, I see. So you warned them."

"Yup. Though, only like a second before I came storming inside."

"....."

I'm scared. Informing them at such a timing is like a declaration of war. She sounds like an assassin coming out of a Hollywood movie.

"A-And how did that end?"

"Luckily, those two work at the same place, so I only had to raid one place. It was amazing. Imagine an office with men and women working, when a young girl wearing a uniform comes barging in."

"Sounds like it could be out of a movie."

“That one was still better. At first I thought of using my motorbike.”

“Why!?”

“I mean, it’d be bad if I couldn’t run away immediately, yeah? I need to confirm my escape routes just to make sure.”

“.....”

Was she a terrorist in her previous life? That sounds far too surreal. She’s not a handicrafts club member for nothing.

“Well, since I thought that taking the motorbike with me was a bit too much, I just barged in there normally.”

“...I feel like you’d cause plenty of a ruckus even without that...?”

“No problems there. After all, they have pretty high positions, so they wouldn’t publicize that kind of incident. If they did, even they wouldn’t get out easily.”

“Well...you’re not wrong.”

Be it Masamune’s parents or the company, they probably want to keep that fact under control, as it would hurt their image. That’s why...they would want to erase all hints that this happened.

“That being the case, I managed to get them.”

“Did you get to talk?”

“Hmmm...they were flustered alright...But, for now, I told them that I’d repay them all the money they used while raising me. That was my final farewell. Now I feel refreshed.”

“.....”

What a girl she is. To think she’d go forcefully meet the parents who would constantly push her away. That’s Usami Masamune for you, I guess. She’s on an entirely different level. Just as she said, she brought a conclusion to her family’s circumstances, facing the parents who had denied her all that time. Although her method of doing so is

a bit questionable...her parents for not wanting to meet her are also at fault.

Either way, Masamune finally managed to bring a conclusion to the relationship with her parents.

“...But.” Masamune looked at me with a strong gaze, like she was picking a fight with me. “There’s actually one more person I need to clear up things with.”

“.....”

Well, I guess that’s to be expected. When I saw her mail, I figured as much. At today’s opening ceremony, I told Konoe of my feelings. In other words, that acted as my response towards Konoe’s and Masamune’s confessions. That’s why...

“...Masamune.” Reflexively, I opened my mouth.

I probably felt apologetic. After all, I rejected her. She said she liked me, and yet I couldn’t respond to those feelings.

“.....”

That’s why I wanted to apologize. However...

“...Hey, what’s that face for, you dummy.” With a sharp voice, Masamune flicked her fingers on my forehead.

However, since she apparently put quite the amount of strength into it, the pain was no joke.

“~~~! Y-You, what was that for...”

“Hmpf, it was a flick on the forehead, deal with it. Or what, did you prefer me running you over with a motorbike?”

“.....”

I went silent on that question. Um...Masamune-san, if you do that to me, then even I will die, okay...No, maybe I’d be fine? After all, she did that before, and I survived.

“Well, leaving aside the idle jokes.” Masamune used the same finger from the forehead flick, and now pointed it at me. “Stupid chicken, you don’t have to feel apologetic about anything. You...haven’t done anything wrong after all.”

“Eh...”

“You chose Subaru-sama over me and Suzutsuki Kanade. But, that was the right choice, because you listened to your own feelings. Suzutsuki Kanade and I...simply liked that about you, that’s why.”

“.....”

“Not to mention, it was much better than keeping things vague all the time. Seeing you confess to Subaru-sama in front of the entire student body...I can only give up.”

“Masamune...” I subconsciously called out her name.

No matter what she said, she looked lonely. What happened at the opening ceremony must have been a shock for her.

“Again, stop with that face!”

“Guha!?”

There, another forehead flick landed a clean hit. T-This nasty rabbit...I was about to give her an earful, but when I saw her expression, all my thoughts just vanished in an instant.

“You...stupid chicken...!” Her voice was shaking.

And, her eyes were watery, shaking. Looking like she was close to breaking out in tears, she called out my name. However, she didn’t cry. Instead, she desperately held back her tears, and continued.

“Don’t underestimate me...!” She declared. “Honestly speaking, I was sad. Of course I would be, I liked you after all. There’s no way I wouldn’t be shocked. But—being depressed all the time won’t do me any good.”

“Masamune...”

“Because...this is something normal, right? The vice prez often says ‘Life will rarely go the way you want it to!’, see. I think she’s right. Everybody experiences a failed love at least once.”

“.....”

“That doesn’t mean I’m suddenly worthless. Being rejected hurt. But...I won’t stay down forever, and lament in grief.”

“.....”

“Or what, is this what you think of me? That I’d always be hung up on this just because I got rejected once? That Usami Masamune could never become happy again? Do you...Do you really think I’m such a weak person?”

“.....No, of course I don’t.” I responded.

I was an idiot, yeah. I guess I was just trying to be sympathetic towards Masamune. Since I rejected her confession, because I couldn’t respond to her feelings, I felt apologetic. But, things are different. Masamune isn’t that weak. She’s trying her hardest to get up again. It’s like she’s taken Schrö-senpai’s words to heart. She’s changed for sure.

“.....”

Memories from the school festival floated back into my head. Back then, she tried to jump off the rooftop. She hit a wall, and tried to run. But, now she’s different.

‘—I want to change!’

She turned these words into a reality, and changed with her own strength. That weakness of hers had completely vanished from back then. That’s what she’s trying to tell me, as she’s fighting off tears.



“...Sorry, Masamune, I was an idiot.”

“H-Hmpf, as long as you understand it...You’re a stupid chicken as always, but I’ll forgive you. Because...” She wiped the tears off her eyes, and spoke up with a quivering voice. “We’re friends after all.”

“.....”

Yeah, she really is strong. She's willing to be friends with me despite everything that happened. That's not something you'd normally expect.

"Thanks, Masamune."

"I-I don't need your gratitude. Leaving that aside...you better make Subaru-sama happy, okay? You rejected my confession...so that's the least I expect from you. If not, I won't ever forgive you."

"Yeah, gotcha." I said, and nodded.

In response to that, Masamune smiled.

"....."

...Yeah. When she smiles, she really is cute.

"Alright, guess it's time for me to head home. They're going to lock the front gate soon." I turned towards the door.

Because it's January, the night turned awfully cold. It'd be bad if we caught a cold before normal classes even began.

"W-Wait!"

However, Masamune pulled on my sleeve, stopping me. While holding onto me...

"I'll...give you a handshake."

"Huh?"

"L-Like I said! A handshake! We'll stay friends from now on, right!? A handshake would be perfectly normal!" She screamed, almost as if she wanted to hide her embarrassment.

...Well, how do I say this...She really can't be honest for even a second. If she wants to shake hands, she should just stay cute and ask for it.

"Just like you, I guess."

“What was that? You were whispering, I couldn’t hear you properly.”

“No, it’s nothing. Come on, let’s shake hands.”

“Urk...Yeah, because we’re friends.” She blushed, and offered me her small palm.

I grabbed her hand, and held it tightly. A warm sensation was conveyed to my own palm in return.

“...Masamune, relax. You’re pressing it so aggressively, it’s hurting me.”

“Hmpf, so noisy. It’s cold, so deal with it.”

“Well...it is warm.”

“See, I told you.” Masamune smiled beneath the winter night sky.

This time, she had a joyful expression completely different from the school festival.

“...Yeah.”

Just as she said, this wasn’t half bad. We’re friends after all.

Chapter 4: Konoe Nagare

“Alright, stupid chicken, see you tomorrow at school.”

It was currently 7pm. In front of the school gate, Masamune gave her final farewell, and then blasted off with her motorbike. I thought of seeing her home today, but she just said ‘Nah, I feel like letting this baby run wild’. I guess she’s built up a good amount of stress, raiding her parents and getting rejected by me.

“Still, how do I say this...”

Why are there so many strong girls around me? They can stand up just fine without any help. I guess this is what it means to become an adult. Well, I just pray they don’t turn into my Mom.

“Well...I guess I can’t lose.” I muttered to myself, and walked down the night streets.

That’s right, I have to become the butler for the Suzutsuki Family. For Konoe’s sake, who accepted my feelings; for Suzutsuki’s sake, who accepted me as her butler; for Masamune, who said she’d stay friends with me...I need to do whatever I can.

“...For starters, I guess I should report it to Mom?”

Right now, she’s overseas training and fighting whoever she can, but she still is my parent, so she should know about the future path I decided on.

“Hey, shitty brat.”

There, I heard a husky voice right ahead of me. Standing there was a tall but slender man. Long hair, sharp glasses on his face—wearing a butler’s uniform. I didn’t even need to look twice, it was Konoe Nagare. He’s another butler at the Suzutsuki Family, and now he stood in my path like he was waiting for me.

“.....”

This is quite the emergency situation.

“Y-Yo, been a while, old man. What a coincidence.”

For starters, I attempted a simple conversation. However, the timing couldn't be worse. To think I'd run into him here...

“No, this isn't a coincidence.”

“Eh?”

“Kanade-ojousama set up the GPS of your phone, allowing her to confirm your location whenever I want to. I am here because of her orders.”

“.....”

Go to hell, Suzutsuki Kanade.

“Huh? But, didn't you smash your phone?”

“Hmpf, don't underestimate a butler like me. I naturally have two phones.”

“In what world is that common sense...” I said, but I actually was sweating profusely.

It feels like he doesn't even have any intentions of properly talking with me. It's like you'd try and have a reasonable conversation with a starving lion. It feels as if my life could be over at any moment. I mean, he's Konoe Nagare, Konoe Subaru's old man, and a helicopter parent on top of that. Worse, he knows about the incident of today's opening ceremony. Considering his previous patterns of action, he might just come straight for my throat.

“Follow me.”

Surprisingly enough, he said those words, and turned his back towards me.....Huh? That's unexpected. Why is he staying so calm? Not to mention telling me to follow him...Where? To hell? To my grave?

“What’s wrong, hurry it up.” He stopped for a second to turn around towards me, and said the following. “I’ll treat you to a meal.”

♀ × ♂

We reached a public park. It was located roughly in the middle between Rouran Academy and my home. Thinking about it, I often came here with Kureha, where she’d torture me with her wrestling moves, and it’s also the place where Nakuru hugged me during last summer break.

“...Alright, three minutes.”

On a small bench in the park, there sat two people—me and the old man. And, we both had instant ramen cups in our hands. For some reason, the old man treated me to cup ramen from the nearby convenience store.

“.....”

...I mean, I also think that this makes no sense. First he’s treating me to something, only to make it cup ramen. So this is going to be my final meal, huh?

“What’s wrong, are you not going to eat? Your noodles will stretch.”

“Y-Yeah, also...why cup ramen?”

“You not satisfied?”

“No, I’m fine, but...what about you? You’re the butler of a renowned family, so eating cup ramen at such a place...”

“Heh, I don’t need you to worry. Gonna ruin the dinner.” He said, and started eating the ramen in his hand.

Slurping up some of the noodles, he let out a satisfied ‘...Phew’. Does he...actually like cup ramen? Oh yeah, Konoe did at least. Maybe it’s a shared trait between father and daughter? Or perhaps butlers prefer this kind of commoner food instead. Either way, I’m totally fine, since I love cup ramen.

“By the way.”

Right as I picked up some noodles with my chopsticks—

“Heard you proposed to my daughter.”

“.....”

Oh lord, I can't even taste my beloved ramen noodles. This is the first time I had dinner with such tension filling my body. I'd rather do some more pro wrestling with Kureha.

“...Old man, you saw Suzutsuki's mail?”

“Yeah. Once I came home, Subaru also told me directly. That's why I came here to talk to you.” He said, and slurped up some more noodles.

I was a bit surprised at his attitude. He just said ‘Talk to you’. I figured he'd go for my throat first.

“.....”

Maybe I was having the wrong image of this old fart? He looks like a helicopter parent, but he might be quite docile...

“...Don't worry.”

However, as if to interrupt my own thoughts, he said the following.

“All the way while coming here, I killed you 120 times in my head.”

“.....”

“Thanks to that, I managed to stay calm. At the very least, you should be fine for another 30 minutes, so let's get this talk done.”

“.....”

...Scary. What's scary? The fact that he can say that with a calm face. It seems like he's raring to beat up the guy who stole his daughter from him. What's even more terrifying is that this guy might become my father-in-law. Once that happens, I really don't know if I can stay

alive.

“Heh, no need to be so terrified. In fact, my opinion of you has improved because of this incident.”

“Eh...?” I froze up.

Improved...? Why? Wasn't I the guy who stole his daughter...?

“I did read Kanade-ojousama's mail.”

“Mail? The one she sent you with details about today's opening ceremony?”

“Yeah. I was surprised, you know. To think you'd propose to Subaru in front of the entire school.”

“Well, I sure went all out.”

“On top of that, you beat up all of the teachers who tried to stop you, right? Declaring ‘Subaru is my wife!’ in front of all of them.”

“.....”

Damn that Devil Suzutuski. She tried to make it sound more epic than it was. Or...maybe this was her way of trying to be considerate? After all, the old man's attitude changed towards me thanks to that.

“Well, doesn't mean I suddenly don't hate you anymore. You got a k-kiss on the cheek by Subaru as well...”

“S-Shut up! I didn't want that either!”

We both threw complaints at each other. Ever since we first met, there was just something that stopped us from getting along. Then again, he beat me up on our first meeting. Though I feel like his hate is a bit exaggerated...

“.....”

Oh yeah, during the first shrine visit, Suzutsuki told me.

‘But, he clearly hates you far too much. After all...he ignored my

orders.’

According to that, during the leisure land incident, she supposedly ordered him to hold back. But, he fully ignored that, and beat me up to the point of near death. As a butler, a master’s orders should be absolute, and yet...

“...Hey.” I found myself asking. “Why do you hate me so much?”

“.....” His chopsticks stopped abruptly.

And then, like he was biting on an insect with his back teeth, he let out a sigh.

“—We resemble each other.”

“...What?”

“You and I. I really hate to say this, but you’re the exact same as I was back when I was younger. That’s why I get so angry when I look at you.”

“Wha.....”

What’s that supposed to mean? I didn’t know what to say in the face of that revelation. Is it that? Feeling hate for people similar to him? But, I sure don’t see that.

“Don’t tell me...is it because you also proposed to a girl?” I said it as a joke, but I immediately heard a snapping sound.

He snapped his chopsticks in half. Okay hold on, what kind of reaction is that? Did he actually?

“Stop fooling around. I never proposed to somebody when I was a student.”

“Ah, I see, I guess that...”

“Well, we did run away together.”

“Isn’t that an even bigger deal!?”

Oh yeah, I heard from Konoe and this old man and her Mom ran away together.

“But...running away together, that’s a bit...”

“Shut up. I don’t want to hear that from the guy who proposed in front of the entire damn school.”

“Urk...”

I-I can’t argue back...But yeah, we might be pretty similar. A proposal and elopement. They are somewhat similar in a way.

“So that means...your family also used you as a punching bag for wrestling moves?”

“Huh? What do you mean by that, stupid brat. My family wasn’t made out of monsters like that. Also, is your family doing that to you?”

“Yeah, that’s how I was raised in the Sakamachi Family.” I shrugged my shoulders.

It’s all her—Sakamachi Akemi’s fault. She’s my Mom, and the one who raised me and Kureha in that spartan environment. Compared to my little monster Kureha, she’s a real one. Though of course, I’m a bit thankful. I ended up with a tough body thanks to that. Still, I wonder where she is right now, maybe fighting a bear somewhere in the north?

“—Wait a second, shitty brat.”

There, the old man spoke with a serious tone. Sheesh, what’s he want now? And what’s that serious gaze for? Did he awaken to some secret interest or whatever? Glasses and glasses together in a public park.

“W-What is it, old man. You want something?”

“...Well, this might just be me thinking too deeply into things, but...” The old man put one hand on his jaw, thinking. “Your family name’s Sakamachi?”

“Why are you asking me that now!?”

We met back in April. You didn’t know about my full name?

“What am I supposed to do? Subaru and Kanade-ojousama only called you ‘Jirou’ all the time.”

“Fine, then let me tell you here. My name is Sakamachi Kinjirou. My little sister is called Sakamachi Kureha, and my Mom’s Sakamachi Akemi.”

On a whim, I told him the names of my other family members. Since Konoe and I will get married, he’ll learn about them one way or another. Though, will this be okay? Both Mom and him are dangerous individuals.

“...Sakamachi Akemi?” However, that old man simply muttered my Mom’s name with a pale face.”Your mother is...Sakamachi Akemi?”

“? Yeah, that’s right. You know her? She’s overseas right now, but she’s on TV from time to time.”

Yeah, Mom’s a famous martial artist often on TV, so I wouldn’t be surprised if he knew.

“Well...I know a lot.”

“...A lot?”

“.....” The old man just stayed quiet.

...Hold on, why does it feel like I stepped on a landmine? Please, say something. Now I’m feeling nervous.

“H-Hey, do you and Mom know each other?”

“.....” After staying quiet for a moment, he responded. “...Yeah.”

I have a bad feeling about this. I don’t like that reaction one bit. But, I’m curious about their relationship...

“.....”

Bad premonition versus curiosity, these two were battling inside of my head, but the winner was the curiosity in the end.

“By the way...what kind of relationship did you and Mom have?”

“.....!”

Immediately upon hearing my question, the old man started sweating profusely, and looked up at the sky. Silence followed. And then, after he put down the empty cup of ramen next to him on the bench—

“—My ex.” He threw a bombshell at me.

“...What?”

Because of this sudden revelation, my head stopped working. E-Ex? So basically, those two...!

“Yeah, you’re right.” Like he had guessed what I was thinking, the old man continued with a resentful tone. “Back in high school, we were dating. She’s my ex-girlfriend.”

♀ × ♂

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?” I couldn’t hold back a scream in the face of this terrifying reveal.

Eh? What is this about? I mean, I know exactly what this means.

“C-Calm down, shitty brat! We’re sitting in a public park at night, remember!? The neighbours will call the police on us if you scream like that!”

“Urk...Y-You’re not wrong, but...”

“Not to mention...her...Chia and us dating happened ages ago.”

“Who’s Chia!?”

“Huh? It’s her nickname, of course. Since she’s Sakamachi Akemi, she became Chia. Everyone called her that way during her student days...”

“Stop! I don’t want to hear about my Mom’s passionate youth!”

Gaaaaaaaaaaaah I feel weird! Chia!? Mom...the real monster of my family...had such a cute nickname...!? And she dated this old fart before...!?

“Don’t be so shocked. Even I was young once. Everybody wants to enjoy their youth.”

“Y-You’re not wrong, but...I’m shocked you could date her.”

“Hm, that’s awfully cold despite being her son, you know?”

“I can say this with full confidence because I am her son!”

“Well, she was somewhat of a delinquent back then...” he said, and let out a sigh.

It seems like my Mom was a troublesome one back then. Ahaha, I can actually sympathize with this guy now. After all, she put me through a lot of trouble in my life so far, and I’m still young.

“What’s wrong, you’re so pale. You look like a dead guy.”

“Well...listening to you just hit deep...I mean, it’s Mom, you know? I can’t see that pro wrestling fanatic ever dating you...”

“Pro wrestling, huh? Yeah, she did say some weird stuff from time to time.”

“...Weird stuff?”

“Something like ‘If I ever make children, I’ll teach them wrestling!’”

“Why did you not stop her!?”

You were her boyfriend back then, right!? Shouldn’t you take up the role as a boyfriend to tell her off!

“Don’t be ridiculous. If I went against her, I’d be in danger for my life.”

“I mean, I fully understand how you feel, but...”

“That’s why I just said ‘That’s right, go do it!’, you know.”

“Youuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu damn chicken bastard!!”

“W-Why are you getting angry at me now? She was happy, and I lived to see another day. Nobody suffered.”

“Because of your lackluster lifestyle, my life was messed up beyond belief!”

S-So cruel...This isn’t right. What an awful butterfly effect this is. To think I’d find out here...It’s all because this bastard didn’t stop her...!

“W-What? You’re looking at me like I was the one who killed your parents...”

“Shut up. My life turned to shit because of you.”

“Heh, selfish as always. I had plenty of trouble myself.”

“Trouble...Were you attending the same school as Mom?”

“Yeah. Rouran Academy, in fact. Chia and I were attending it as well. I was working as a butler of the Suzutsuki family back then. By the way, we were in the same class all three years.”

“You’re both my seniors...”

I mean, thinking about it, it makes sense. Suzutsuki’s dad is the board chairman of Rouran Academy, so naturally a butler for the family would be attending it. However, to think they were classmates...

“Well, a lot happened, and I broke up with Chia.”

“...You alright back then? I feel like Mom can be quite emotional, so weren’t you having a fight during that breakup?”

“No problem. Took me three ribs though.”

“Sounds like a damn serious problem to me!”

“Heh, that’s an easy price to pay. She wasn’t called ‘Bipedal Hurricane’ for nothing.”

“Sure sounds like a violent nickname to have!”

Well, it sounds like Mom, alright. Her strength feels inhumane at times. Even inside the house, I sometimes saw this hurricane attitude. Thanks to that, not even my own home felt safe at times.

“Well, it’s a pretty long story, but...After Chia and I broke up, I started dating Subaru’s mother. Several years later, we ran away together, and got married. Then, Subaru was born.” The old man said, pushing up his silver-rimmed glasses.

Hmmm, he’s been through quite the dramatic life, huh. Well, he was already a lost cause when he started dating Mom. It’s like you’re dancing hand-in-hand with a bloodthirsty lion. If I was her, I’d definitely reject her.

“But, now I feel relieved.” There, the old man suddenly changed his tone.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“It’s simple. If you’re her son...then you won’t break from just a hit, right? She’s been training you over the years, yeah?”

“.....”

Weird. He’s suddenly sounding like the enemy of a battle manga. Well, he’s not exactly wrong, but I’m scared as to why that would matter right now.

“Listen up, shitty brat. Let me get to the main problem.”

“.....”

I swallowed my breath. Main problem, he said. He probably invited me out here in order to talk about that. And if I had to guess...

“Your wish is to marry Subaru and become the butler of the Suzutsuki Family. However, I won’t accept that. Neither as her father,

nor as a butler of the Suzutsuki Family myself.”

“.....”

Well, that’s about what I expected. I understand his feelings. If I was in his position, I’d probably say the same thing. Marrying Konoe, and becoming a butler for the Suzutsuki Family—I know it sounds weird coming from me, but it sure is a crazy plan to make.

“.....”

But even so—

“That being the case, I’m giving you some homework.”

“...Excuse me?” I was bewildered.

Homework? Basically, if I clear that, I’ll be able to become a butler at the Suzutsuki Family?

“What’s wrong? Why do you look so confused?”

“I mean...I was surprised. You hate me, right?”

“Of course I do, I can’t stand your face. But what bothers me the most...is that my daughter is different.”

“...Konoe is?”

“Yeah. Today, when I came home today, she approached me, begging me to give you permission to become a butler for the Suzutsuki Family. Honestly speaking, even as a parent...I’ve never seen her that serious before.”

“.....”

“Not to mention...it feels like Subaru changed a bit. Or rather, she managed to change. For a while, it seemed like she was pondering about something...but today, it felt like she finally overcame that. You’re the reason for that, right, you shitty brat. You saved Subaru. So, as her parent, I need to thank you.”

“...No, it’s fine. I didn’t do anything big.”

That’s right, Konoe herself managed to change. Because she didn’t stay down, because she didn’t give up, and worked hard.

“That being said, simply because my daughter asked for it, I can’t just accept you. That’s why I’m giving you some homework—a trial so to speak.”

“What trial are you talking about?”

It probably is about a butler, right?

“Ain’t that obvious?” The old man spoke with a light tone like he was talking during breakfast. “—A fight.”

“...Huh?”

“It’s simple. If you win against me, I’ll let you marry my daughter, and become a butler. That’s why, fight with me.”

“You fine with that kind of trial!?”

That doesn’t have anything to do with a butler, right!? I mean, since I’d technically be Suzutsuki’s butler, I guess I need to be strong in a fight, but this is just...

“What? You don’t like that? I’m being considerate of you, alright?”

“Huh? Considerate? What do you mean.”

“Hmpf, if you don’t get it, then let me explain it to you. You’re just some amateur in the end. If I gave you an actual trial worthy of a butler, you wouldn’t ever pass.”

“Urk...!”

T-This damn helicopter parent...! Now all of a sudden he’s bringing up a logical point!? I mean, it’s true that I probably can’t be a perfect butler right away. I probably have better chances in a fight with him. I’m the oldest son of the Sakamachi Family, and I’ve been trained for years. I’m a bit confident when it comes to my fighting skill. So in a

sense, I guess he's trying to be considerate of me.

"Not to mention."

However...the old man suddenly grinned.

"With this, I'm allowed to beat you up as much as I want."

"....."

Ahh, I see. This trial is just that convenient for him. Now he can legally beat the man who tried to steal his daughter to a pulp. Ahaha, am I going to be okay?

"Damn it...Your personality really is nasty..."

"Don't be ridiculous. This is a natural thought process for a man who has a daughter. On top of that, you're a good fighter, right? You're Sakamachi Akemi's son. Not to mention..."

"Not to mention...what?"

"....." He went silent for a moment. "No, it's nothing. I'm getting the creeps just thinking about it." He suddenly was all angry at me.

"Anyway, you have to win against me. Simple is best, right? Naturally, if you lose, you won't get permission to marry Subaru, and you won't become the new butler of the Suzutsuki Family."

"....." I bit my lip.

Damn it...He really is one nasty old man. He's calling it a fight, but he's clearly superior in strength compared to me. Remember what happened at the leisure land back in April. I couldn't even hit him once. It's been roughly a year since then, and I've been training on the side, but I have no idea if that helped narrow the gap...

"...Anyway, this is all I'm going to tell you. The day of the trial...will be this weekend, at the Suzutsuki Family's garden. And then, I will test if you are worthy of being a butler...and worthy of marrying Subaru." He said, and stood up.

Seems like he's done talking. He stuffed the empty cup of ramen into

the public trash bin, and was about to walk away—

“Ah, right.”

Right as he reached the exit of the park, he turned around.

“Hey, shitty brat.”

“What do you want, old man.”

“I mean, not like I have any reason to tell you, but...” He cleared his throat. “If there’s something you want, you gotta obtain it with your own hands.” He said, and walked out of the park for good.

“.....” I was confused.

That just now...was he trying to give me advice?

“Damn it...”

Underestimating me again. To think he’d tell that to his enemy. He sure seems confident.

“...Stop joking around.” I grumbled, and looked at the palm of my right hand.

...Fine then. I’ll win against Konoe Nagare. If that allows me to become the butler of the Suzutsuki Family, and to be together with Konoe...

“...I’ll do it.”

While forming a fist beneath the winter sky, I muttered as if to affirm my determination.

Chapter 5: Suzutsuki Kanade

“Nya? Welcome back, Nii-san.”

It was currently a bit past 8pm. Upon returning home, Kureha greeted me.

“I’m home. Did Suzutsuki go back?”

“Yup. Right after you went out on the date.”

“I see...”

She probably is learning of the condition placed on me if I want to become her butler. Well, there’s not really much she can do in that regard. It’s about a battle with me and the old man.

“I guess it’d be best to sleep early today? We got normal class tomorrow.”

“Yeah, I know.”

My little sister was already wearing plain pajamas. Today it’s a normal one, but sometimes she has sheep characters imprinted on it. Naturally, that was the Silent Sheep. I hear there’s even more fans now. Personally, I’d just have nightmares about my clothes strangling me if I actually wore that.

“.....”

Well, ignoring that problem.

“Kureha, I have somewhat of a request, do you mind?”

“What’s up?” Kureha tilted her head like a small animal.

I took a deep breath, and then spoke up.

“Won’t you—fight me?”

“Eh? Right now?”

“Yep, right now.”

“Hmm, that’s unexpected. Asking for...Ah, are you just acting, and you actually want to do some nighttime pro wrestling...”

“Hell no.”

“Where? On Nii-san’s bed?”

“Listen to me!”

Who’d do something like that with you, seriously. We’ve been living together for more than ten years, so asking me to feel lust towards my actual little sister is like going on a mission impossible. I’m not Tom Cr*ise, you hear me.

“Then, why? Normally you wouldn’t go out of your way to even train, right?”

“Well...”

Since there was no real reason to hide it, I explained just what happened today at the park to Kureha. Namely, the trial Konoe Nagare gave me, and that I have to win against him in order to become a butler for the Suzutsuki Family. Of course, the fact about marrying Konoe as well...

“Nya...” Kureha put one hand on her chin, and groaned. “That is quite the serial situation.”

“.....”

Don’t you mean serious? Who’s a serial killer, oi? Is she taking my earnest problem as some kind of joke?

“Basically, you want me to practice with you, Nii-san?”

“Well, something like that. Honestly speaking, you’re pretty strong after all.”

I mean, the old man definitely is stronger than her, but it's better than not doing anything at all. Training with Kureha will give me some good experience at least. Basically, I'd love for her to be my sparring partner before the match.

"I don't mind, but...are you sure? Konoe-senpai's father is super strong, right?"

"That's why I'm asking you for help. Right now, my chances of winning are pretty low."

That's right, I couldn't hope to do anything against the old man back then. I only have a few days until the trial. I need to lessen the gap between us as much as possible.

"Hmmm...In your case, there's another problem besides training..."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Um..." Kureha was thinking about it for a second. "Well, whatever. I guess showing it to you would be faster than explaining it." She muttered. "Anyway, I'll prepare myself. Can't fight you while looking like this." She said, and walked up the stairs to the second floor.

...? What's with her? I'm happy she's willing to help...but what does she mean by that? Is she referring to my gynophobia? I've already been cured of that, so no problem. And even if I hadn't, the old man's a guy.

"Ah, right." Right before leaving, Kureha turned around towards me, and continued with a serious voice. "Hey, Nii-san...Did you properly prepare yourself?"

"...Prepare?"

"I told you just now, but Konoe-senpai's father is very strong. It's just my intuition, but probably on the same level as Mom. You won't get out of this fight unscathed."

"...That sucks, alright."

When it comes to battling and fighting, Kureha's intuition generally is

on-point. If she says so, then the old man must be on Mom's level. So far, I never managed to win against her. But...

"Don't worry, I'm ready no matter what will happen."

I've decided to fight. Daily life, reality, future...I've decided to fight whatever gets in my way. If not, I wouldn't have proposed to Konoe.

"Nyaha, no problem then. That's my Nii-san, alright."

"Well, I haven't been your older brother for the past ten years for nothing."

Honestly speaking, the only time I won against her was back during the sports festival. Not to mention that I had to use rather unfair methods.

"If you're serious, then I have my own idea about this, Nii-san." She said with a serious expression. "I'll fight you seriously."

"....."

...Was that just my imagination, or did she just drop a bombshell?

"K-Kureha, what do you mean about that?"

"Eh? Like I said, I'm going to fight you seriously. Over the past few years, I've always been holding back when we were fighting."

"Why would you!?"

"I mean, that would end things far too quickly. Wouldn't be fun if I killed you in a matter of seconds."

"....."

Somebody help me. My blood-related little sister is out to kill me.

"That's why, the only person I fought for real lately is the vice captain. But...today will be different."

"Urk."

“Now that you made up your mind, I won’t hold back anymore. I’m going full blast full throttle. I’ll show you the true strength of Sakamachi Kureha.”

“.....”

“That being the case, do your best, Nii-san. If not, you’ll get hurt before even fighting Konoe-senpai’s father, nyahaha! Anyway, I’ll see you down at the dojo. I’m looking forward to it, Nii-san!” She grinned, and ran up the stairs.



...Okay, I think I just stepped on an awful landmine. Of course, the name of that landmine is Sakamachi Kureha. Somebody call the bomb squad right now. If not, my HP will reach 0...Still, that's my little sister for you, I guess. She's an animal when it comes to fighting.

"...Guess I can't back down now." I clapped my palms on my cheeks.

If I had to guess, Kureha is just trying to be considerate in her own way. She said that she'd go all out for me. That's the best way to prepare me for my battle with the old man. So, I have to respond to her feelings.

"Though, it sure is a wicked way of being considerate..." I let out a sigh, and moved to my own room up on the second floor.

For now, I have to write my testament.

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"...Gah."

I let out a sound like a frog that got stepped on, and collapsed onto my bed. Right now, it's half past midnight, and roughly four hours since I came home. I was finally freed from my sparring with Kureha down at the dojo, and finished my bath to go back to my own room. My arms and legs were shaking. I couldn't move them properly though. Well, if there is one thing I could say...

"...She's not human."

Finally, I figured out what my little sister is. I had no chance when she got serious. It's like a total beginner went to fight a professional. She's far too strong. I'm a family member of the Sakamachi family, so I was at least confident in my skill, but I got absolutely obliterated. Rather than becoming stronger to defeat the old man, it's like my confidence was crushed.

"Not to mention that she still seemed relaxed."

I was completely serious, but Kureha was all like 'You can't give up! You're still not completely serious! Do your best tomorrow!'. That damn wrestling freak, how can she even say that? It'll just make me feel even more depressed.

"...I'll just head to bed for today."

Judging from Kureha's excitement, she'll probably help me train every single day, so I gotta recover as quickly as possible. With a shaking hand, I set up my alarm next to my pillow. Since I have

trouble getting up in the morning, Kureha will wake me up with more wrestling techniques immediately. I can only curse my own disposition.

Thinking about it, a lot happened today. I proposed to Konoe at the opening ceremony, went on a double date with the Narumi sisters, was called to the rooftop by Masamune, had a verbal battle with the old man, and was trained by Kureha. Safe to say that I'm exhausted.

"Yaaaaawn..." I turned off the lights, and fell backwards onto my bed.

All the exhaustion stored up today let me blink out faster than usual. Okay, now I'll be able to get some good sleep—

"My, you can't sleep just yet, you know?"

However, with the sudden appearance of a dignified voice, all my sleepiness was blessed away instantaneously.

"...!?"

I reflexively tried to push up my body, but as if she had expected my movement, she had sat on my hips. In other words, she was mounting me. On top of that, with a blindfold, she completely robbed me of my ability to see.

"Urk...!"

I tried to jump up, but because of Kureha's training, I already blasted past my limit. Damn it, I can't even fight back now...!

"Good evening, Jirou-kun."

".....!"

More importantly, the owner of that voice is...

"Fufu, you don't look too well. Am I that heavy? I feel like I'm being quite conscious of my weight."

"S-Suzutsuki...!"

That's right, this is Suzutsuki Kanade. Because my sight had been robbed from me, I couldn't see her at all, but it had to be that sadistic rich lady.

"W-Why are you here!? Kureha said you went home!"

"Fufu, I'm sorry, but I kept a window open while Kureha-chan wasn't looking. I acted like I had gone home, but snuck inside through the open window."

"Wha..."

U-Unbelievable...She's like an invader.

"After I invited myself in, I hid in this room so that Kureha-chan wouldn't spot me. Precisely, I was waiting in your closet."

"Waiting...Why? Does Konoe know that you're here?"

"Of course not. She's staying over at Usami-san's home, and I told everyone I'd be home late."

"Making up your usual nonsense again."

"Indeed. But, Jirou-kun, I just needed to visit your room. After all..."
There, Suzutsuki's voice stopped.

"Nii-san? I heard some weird noises from your room, are you okay?"
A voice passed through the closer door.

It's Kureha. Seems like she heard the noise the two of us were making, and came to check up on me. Since her room's also on the second floor, that was to be expected after all. However, this is a chance, if I ask for help here...

"Seems like something troublesome happened, Jirou-kun."

Right as I was thinking that, Suzutsuki called out to me with a whisper.

"Huh? Like I care. I'm only going to ask Kureha for help."

“Fufu, are you sure about doing that?” She let out a snicker. “After all, I’m naked right now.”

“.....”

Because of this abrupt yet explosive bombshell, my head just flashed blank white for a moment. It was like Ground Zero, as everything previously in my head was now gone.

“That’s why, it would be pretty bad if Kureha-chan saw us right now, don’t you agree? You are dating Subaru, so she might accuse you of cheating.”

“.....”

“On top of that, today is the day you proposed to Subaru, right.”

“.....”

“Surely, Kureha-chan would get angry at you. She’s really attached to Subaru after all. If she saw me naked in bed with you...she might just go rampant.” She spoke with a calm tone like she was ordering some food at a restaurant.

...This is bad. Just as she said, this situation couldn’t be worse. Why did she come to my room at such a time, not to mention naked? For now, I’ll ignore that. After all, I proposed to Konoe today, and I just declared that she and I were dating in front of Kureha. Yet, if she now saw me and Suzutsuki like this, she would surely kill me.

“Nii-san? You okay? Did something happen?”

Urk...

“Also, can I come in?”

Lord help me.

“If something happened, then I’ll come save you. Honestly speaking, you were pretty cool at the opening ceremony today. That’s why, if something’s wrong I’m here for you.” Kureha said with a somewhat bashful tone.

Waaaaah, stop that! Don't open the door! If you come in now, your reputation of me will drop to the floor again! Also, you'll change into a female terminator!

"Now, what will you do, Jirou-kun?"

"Urk..."

"Just to let you know, but since I officially went back home, I can't help you."

"Gggggghhh...!"

T-This devil! Fine then, I've made it through many battlefields so far. I mean, most of them feel more like romcom events, but it's true that I was constantly wrapped up in trouble. That's why, I'll use all of my experience to make it through this...!

"K-Kureha!"

I made up my mind, and spoke up, feeling like I was talking with a terrorist holding hostages at gunpoint. What's most important is to build a conversation, as long as I can stop her from opening that door...!

"Ah, so you were awake, Nii-san."

"W-Well, I was sleeping until now, but your voice woke me up."

"Mmnn, sorry about that. But, I heard some weird noises from your room."

"Weird noises? Maybe it was just your imagination?"

"...Nii-san, are you hiding something from me?"

"O-Of course not!"

"Really? It seems like you're trying to stop me from entering the room...Is somebody hiding in your room?"

"W-W-What are you thinking!?"

She's basically analyzing every single breath I take. Damn it, why is she so sharp all of a sudden...I'm sorry, Konoe, it seems like I might die before I get to marry you. I don't need a funeral, I don't think you'll be able to even recognize my corpse...And it's all because Suzutsuki barged into my room naked...

“.....”

No, hold on a second. There is one method of protecting my life against Kureha. But, this method is dangerous. If I use that, I might lose...a lot...

“Hey, Nii-san, can I come in?”

“...!”

...No other choice but to do it. That's what I decided on. In order to become a butler for the Suzutsuki Family, in order to marry Konoe, I can't die just yet.

“Wait, Kureha! You can't come in right now.”

“Eh? Why?” My little sister sounded confused.

I hesitated for a moment, and continued.

“Actually...I'm naked right now.”

“Why are you naked!?”

“Well, I just felt like sleeping naked.”

“T-That sure is one wild style of sleeping. But, why...”

“It's because I have a girlfriend now.”

“And why does that matter!? I can't follow at all!”

“It's because you don't have a lover.”

“You only understand that after getting a lover!?”

“Don't panic like that. I'm surprised myself. My values changed this

much simply because I have a girlfriend now.”

“V-Values...”

“Yeah. I can’t even get proper sleep without being fully naked.”

“.....”

An awkward silence reigned between the two of us...I guess that wasn’t good enough? I feel like I’m just making up nonsense as we go along. There’s no way Kureha would buy that...

“I see, so Nii-san has changed.”

You’re buying it!? Come on, be a bit more doubtful, my little sister. You won’t survive in society if you act like that.

“Well, it sounds believable enough coming from you.”

“Eh...”

“Nii-san can’t be helped sometimes.”

“.....”

“I’m sure that you must be excited because you finally got a girlfriend. That’s why you can’t sleep without being naked. Right, Nii-san?”

“Y-Yeah, good guess.”

A-Ahahaha, what is even happening. I wonder why, it feels like Kureha lost her last bit of respect for me. Who’d sleep naked simply because they suddenly got a girlfriend...I don’t want to be that kind of character...

“It’s fine. No matter how much you change, I won’t cast you away, Nii-san.”

“R-Right, thanks. But, why don’t you head to sleep now? Like you said, we got classes tomorrow, so getting some more sleep wouldn’t hurt.”

“Yup! Will do! Night, Nii-san! I won’t come to your room again, so you just sleep! Naked, that is!” She said, and I heard footsteps slowly distancing themselves.

...I’m saved. I mean...at what cost. For now, I’ll just ignore that. Instead, I have to focus on the bigger problem.

“Fufu, great work there, Jirou-kun.”

She must have waited for Kureha to leave, because Suzutsuki called out to me with a loud voice.

“...Explain yourself.” I demanded.

Why is she here in my room? Not to mention naked according to what she said. For crying out loud, this is almost as if she—

“My, isn’t that obvious?” Suzutsuki spoke with a teasing tone. “I’m here to do **that** with you.”

“.....”

Don’t joke around. She should know that I proposed to Konoe, and that we’re dating.

“Hey...”

“.....!?”

My heart skipped a beat, even if I didn’t want it to. Her slender finger ran along my abdomen.

“Jirou-kun.” She said. “Just tonight is fine...Please, make me yours.”

“...!”

Even I understood the meaning of her words. Also, I’m honestly impressed she can be this straightforward with it.

“That reminds me.” Suzutsuki continued. “Nagare contacted me. He said that he’d see if you’re a worthy butler for my family...But, there’s no need for any of that.”

“Wha...”

“Jirou-kun. Just for tonight...accept me. If you do that, then I'll make you my butler. I'll force it past Nagare with my authority. There's no way he can go against my orders.”

“.....”

It was an all too promising invitation. If I simply accept her here, I'll be made a butler of the Suzutsuki Family. After all, she's the single daughter of the family, so even the old man has to listen to her. Damn Devil Suzutsuki, every single time she puts trials like these on me.

“...Jirou-kun.”

And then, she whispered with a faint voice, as she caressed my ribs.

“...Please, tell me your answer.”

“.....”

Amidst the reigning darkness, the sensation of her palm covering my eyes disappeared. What appeared at first sight was Suzutsuki Kanade herself. Her long and glossy hair, her white skin looking like snow not walked upon, a slender body line, and large eyes. In her eyes, I could see myself. That's why...

“—Got it.” I simply responded.

“.....Are you really sure, Jirou-kun?”

“Yeah, I'll give you my answer. That's why, can you get off me?”

“...Understood.”

The sensation touching my abdomen disappeared, as Suzutsuki slowly got off me. At the same time, I pushed up my upper body. Suzutsuki sat down next to me on the bed.

“...Suzutsuki.” Slowly, I took her hand, and put my lips on the back of her hand.

“...Jirou-kun?”

She seemed to be surprised at that, because her voice was higher than usual. I slowly moved my lips away.

“...I’m sorry, Suzutsuki, but this is the best I can do.”

“.....”

“You’re my friend, and quite possibly my future master. I will listen to your orders to a certain degree. I don’t mind if it’s a funny prank that we can laugh at together. I don’t hate energetic days either. But...I can’t do any more than that. This...is my answer.” I told her without hesitation.



I chose Konoe, not Suzutsuki. That's why I have to tell her about my own feelings.

"...Hehe." She let out a faint snicker. "Thank you, Jirou-kun, for telling me your answer."

"No need to thank me. Not to mention...you probably weren't serious either, right?"

She's Suzutsuki Kanade, Konoe Subaru's former master, and good friend. That's why she wouldn't forcefully try to tie the knot between me and her.

"...You're right." Suzutsuki nodded. "I'm sorry, all of that just now was me making up things."

"Were you...testing me?"

"...Yes. I guess it's something similar to what Nagare thought of. But, it was a trial for you. If you had accepted me here, I probably would not have taken you as my butler."

"....."

Well, I guess that's expected. Konoe and I are dating, and I even proposed. That's why I can't accept Suzutsuki. Even if I'm some brat, I wouldn't do something so irresponsible.

"But, why were you attacking me naked like that?"

"My, isn't that important to set the mood?"

Inside this darkness, Suzutsuki let out a snicker.

"Come on, put on some clothes." I turned my back towards her.

Silence—and then.

"Hey, Jirou-kun." Suzutsuki spoke up with a voice that made it sound like she was close to breaking out in tears. How...did you know that I wasn't serious?"

"...Moron. We've been together for almost a year now, that's the least I can figure out."

"....."

"Suzutsuki, you and Konoe are friends, right? There's no way you would do something like this to her. You're the type to constantly make up nonsense, but you would never betray Konoe."

“.....”

“Not to mention...You knew that I wouldn’t agree to your invitation, right? You knew...but you wanted to test me.”

“.....” Suzutsuki stayed quiet for a moment. “...You’re right.” She muttered, as if she simply wanted to tell herself. “I probably...wanted a definitive answer.”

“.....”

—A definitive answer. Basically, a proof that I chose Konoe, and a sign that I was never going to pick her. Just as she said just now, she should have known that I wouldn’t jump onto her invitation. But even so, she wanted a definitive response. That’s why she tried to seduce me. She knew I’d say no, but needed to hear my answer. As a way of fully dealing with her feelings—

“...I’m sorry, Jirou-kun. It seems like I’m the type of woman who doesn’t know when to give up. I should have known better the moment I saw you propose to Subaru at the opening ceremony...”

“...Don’t worry about it, we all are lost from time to time.”

“Hehe, sounding all cool out of nowhere.” Amidst the darkness, Suzutsuki smiled.

That’s right, everybody ends up lost from time to time. Talk about her, she’s accepting the guy who rejected her as her butler. I guess she came to my room to finally get a clean cut on her one-sided love. Just like Masamune screamed on that roof today.

“Well, a kiss on the back of my hand was taking it a bit too far.”

“S-Shut up, I couldn’t come up with anything else!”

“Fufu, I’ll give you a passing grade. After all...you’ll become my butler, so that kind of kiss isn’t as bad. You’re like my knight in shining armor.”

“I feel like I’ve just been employed at a black company though.”

“Of course not? I’m sure that you’ll have fun working for my family. We all have such lively personalities, and I’ll be your master. You won’t ever be bored. That’s why...” She spoke that far, and then tapped me on the shoulder.

I guess she finished changing. Turning around, there stood Suzutsuki Kanade in her usual clothes. No tears were found in her eyes, as she simply smiled at me.

“You must become my butler.”

“...Yeah, leave it to me.” I confidently answered.

Master and butler...that’s the kind of relationship the both of us are aiming for. I may have chosen Konoe, and thus can’t become Suzutsuki’s lover...but as a butler, I can still be with her. As her butler, and as her friend, I want to be with her.

“...Thank you. But, will you really be okay? I heard about Nagare’s trial.”

“Don’t you worry, I’ll do something about it.”

“By the way, what is the trial about?”

“A fight.”

“...Phew, what nonsense. I was expecting something a bit more refined than that. Or, do men just enjoy beating each other up?”

“I don’t particularly mind. Not to mention that it just feels like that old man.”

“Fufu, that makes sense. Either way...Do your best, Jirou-kun.” She said, evidently supporting me.

“Yeah, I’ll definitely become your butler.” I responded to her feelings.

To that, Suzutsuki showed a bright smile, and quietly left my room.

“.....”

Thus, all of today's chaos finally ended. It may have been only a short conversation, but I doubt I will ever forget what happened tonight.

Chapter 6: Sakamachi Kinjirou

In life, there's many things that necessarily won't go your way. That's what Schrö-senpai told me. I wholeheartedly agree with that. Nothing ever really works out in life. Through this past year, I've experienced all sorts of troubles. What's important is to get up again from whatever knocks you down. It's simple, really. Everybody goes through something like that once, and it's a simple goal to follow.

However, Schrö-senpai also said that it's simple, but not easy to do. After all, it takes a lot of courage to get back up again. Any naive thinking will only pull you down more. Reality is the most unreasonable world out there.

“.....”

Of course, such an explanation doesn't have much credibility from some high school brat like me. But, there's something even I understand.

‘If you want something, grasp it with your own hands.’

It sure sounds cheesy, but it's exactly what the old man said. If I want something, I have to obtain it with my own strength. That's why I came here today.

“Morning, Jirou.”

January 9th, Sunday, I stood in front of the Suzutsuki Family's gate, with Konoe greeting me. She wore Rouran Academy's girls' uniform. Well, that's to be expected, I guess. She's not Suzutsuki's butler anymore, but a normal girl attending Rouran. Subaru-sama's a girl, can you imagine. Naturally, this revelation caused a great ruckus at school.

Every single recess, a large crowd of people gathered in front of our class, the center of attention being Konoe at every given moment. These last few days, I felt like an animal in a zoo. But even so, Nakuru's new Subaru-sama fanclub caused no ruckus. Rather, several

boys came attacking me instead, especially Kurose who was all like ‘Go die in hell, you romcom bastard!’, trying to punch me. Well, I get where he’s coming from.

“Yo, Konoe, where’s the old man?”

“Waiting in the garden.”

“Right.”

Looking at the time, it was currently 11.45am. We planned to meet up at noon flat—for the battle between me and the old man, which would greatly influence my future.

“.....”

No, not just me. It’s about Sakamachi Kinjirou and Konoe Subaru. This fight today will decide both our futures.

“By the way, Kureha-chan’s already here.”

“Yeah, I haven’t seen her at home all day, so I figured she came here.”

It seems like she came here to cheer me on. Or rather, she probably wants seconds on whoever’s the winner. Well, she’s been training me lately, so the best I can do is show my results.

“Usami’s here as well.”

“...Eh? She’s here?”

“Yup. Kana-chan apparently called her over. That’s why, Kana-chan, Usami, Kureha-chan, and I will be watching over you.”

“Phew, quite the audience.”

Well, not like it matters. The bigger the audience, the more fired up I am. Also, it makes me feel like I can’t lose. Surely, they must all wish for me to win.

“Alright, it’s showtime.” I clapped my hands on my cheeks, and

stepped forward.

Once I make it through this gate, there's no going back. Konoe Nagare is waiting for me and the future I wish for.

“...Jirou.”

There, right before I passed the gate, Konoe pulled on my sleeve. Looking over, she had her face casted downwards.

“—Will you be okay?”

“...Of course, no problem at all. I'll show you that I can make it through this.” I wanted to reassure her, and instinctively said so.

Honestly speaking, my chances of winning aren't the best. Over these past few days, I've been through hellish training from Kureha, so I'm probably the strongest I've ever been, but we're talking about the old man. According to Kureha, he's probably about the same caliber as Mom. This is pretty amazing, because I've never seen anybody rival her. Well, that's probably how he managed to date Mom before. But...I still can't afford to lose despite that. Konoe, Suzutsuki, Masamune...and for my own sake...

“Don't be so worried about me.” I tried to cheer her up. However...

“...!?”

The reason I received shocked me.

“...Moron.”

Together with that mutter, a warm sensation assaulted me. Konoe jumped into my arms.

“K-Konoe?”

“.....”

I called out to her, but no response came, only silence filling the air.

“...There's no way I wouldn't be worried...” She spoke with a voice

like she was holding something back.

Ahhh, I see. She really must be worried. About my battle, and if I can win against the old man, allowing me to inherit her dream.

“...It’s fine, I’ll definitely win against the old man.” I embraced Konoe.

However...

“Guha!?”

Suddenly, Konoe strangled me with a bear hug. W-What is she doing...! Also, I can actually hear my bones crackngggggggg!?

“K-Konoe, what are you...!?” I screamed.

In return, Konoe’s strength let up a bit, as she slowly raised her head.

“—Ah.”

The moment I saw her face, I lost my words. She was crying. Large grains of water built up in the corners of her translucent eyes.

“...Dummy.” There, she spoke up with quivering lips, like she was trying her hardest to connect her words. “I’m not worried about that...”

“...Eh?”

What does she mean? What is she worried about then?

“Please, Jirou...” She whimpered. “Please...come back safe.”

“.....”

For a moment, I failed to understand her words. However, it all became clear right after. As well as her feelings.

“You probably know, but Dad...is strong. Much stronger than me.”

“.....”

“On top of that, he definitely won’t hold back against you. After all, he’s a butler of the Suzutsuki Family, and my Dad. That’s why, as a butler and as a father, he definitely won’t let you off easily. He’ll try to kill you...”

“Konoe...”

“That’s why, you don’t have to win against him today. You can lose, and you don’t have to become a butler to inherit my dream or anything. I’m begging you...just be safe. If you come back to me... that’s all I’m asking for...!”

“.....”

...Man, I really was an idiot. Konoe was worried about me. She probably doesn’t want me to get hurt in my fight with the old man. He probably won’t kill me, but there’s a good chance he’ll beat me up beyond recognition. Just as Konoe said, he surely has no intent on holding back. That’s why she’s been worried this entire time.

“...Thanks.” I told Konoe.

“...Jirou?” With teary eyes, she looked up at me.

“Konoe.” I’m going to tell her about all my feelings. “Believe in me.”

“.....” Konoe swallowed her breath.

After that, she moved away from me, and wiped her teary eyes with the sleeve of her uniform...Yeah, surely she must have understood with that. No matter what, I’ll come back safe. And, I’ll win against the old man. There’s no way I would lose. I’ll definitely become the butler of the Suzutsuki family...and inherit her dream. And then, I can finally be with you—and protect you.

“.....”

Ahh, now I finally understand my old man’s words—Stand By Me. Become someone who can say that. For crying out loud...my old man sure was a romanticist. It sure sounds lame to be honest, but for today, I’ll bet on those words. After all, I want to always be with Konoe Subaru...so for that sake, I’m fighting.

“—Okay.” Konoe spoke with a clear voice. “I’ll believe you, Jirou.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

We smiled at each other, and passed through the gate. Shortly after, we reached the aforementioned garden at the Suzutsuki Residence. It had the size of a small public park, with grass growing in one corner. There stood Konoe Nagare. As always, he wore a butler’s uniform. That’s probably his formal dress, so to speak. I myself am wearing Rouran Academy’s uniform after all. Sure, I could have worn some more sports-esque clothes, but...this isn’t a battle during a tournament, it’s a fist fight. A bit further away from the old man stood three girls.

“Yaho, Nii-san. Should I take your jacket?”

“Yeah, please do, Kureha.” I said, and passed Kureha the jacket of my uniform.

How do I say this, she really is out for leftovers, huh. Well, that’s just like her, I guess.

“You gonna be okay? Should I give you a boost before the real fight starts?”

“I don’t need that, I’m plenty pumped up already.”

“Ehhh, what a shame. I was thinking that you’d be fired up with a Pallo Special¹.”

“You’re going to break me before the fight even starts.”

“Nyahaha! Well, you’ll be fine. If you’re down for the count, just remember the special training I gave you these past few days!”

“.....”

...Stop, please. I don’t want to remember the past few days, okay. All I understood from that is the fact that my little sister isn’t human anymore.

“Alright, you show him, Nii-san.”

“Yeah, I gotcha.”

“Even if you lose, I’ll make sure to pick up your bones.”

“I definitely don’t want to leave my bones in your care, alright, you wrestling fanatic.”

We exchanged some brief banter, and then put our fists together. For a family full of fighting maniacs, it’s like a greeting. Thinking about it, because of her and Mom, my life was turned upside down due to my gynophobia.

“.....”

But, thinking about it now, she and Mom trained me and brought me this far. After all—I resembled my father. That’s what Konoe told me back in May, so when I was wearing glasses, I pretty much overlapped with my late father. Because of that, Mom and Kureha must have been worried about me. That I might pass away because of a disease or sickness.

Thinking about it, I’ve been going through this training for over ten years now. It’s right around the time my old man passed away. I guess it’d fit. That’s why they’ve been training me all this time. All so that I would become stronger, and more healthy. So that I would acquire a body that wouldn’t lose to some sickness. Thanks to that, I’m perfectly healthy, my body doing better than ever. I ended up with that nasty gynophobia, and now I’ve managed to win against that as well. Right now, all I have is the strength they passed onto me.

“.....”

...No, that’s not the only reason they were training me. They were definitely having fun while fighting me. Though, I’ll just keep my gratitude, and forgive them for that. After all, we’re family.

“—Stupid chicken.” There, Masamune spoke up. “Might be a bit sudden, but I got a message for you.”

“Message?”

“A passionate fight of glasses boy X glasses butler! But, the one to win in the end will be Senpai!’...By the way, the sender of that was...”

“Stop, I can already guess who it is.”

Damn that glasses junkie. Also, she didn’t call it ‘vs’, but ‘x’ instead. Is she trying to make a shipping war out of this...No, calm down. She’s just trying to ease the tension with a lighthearted joke.

“I have another one from the vice club prez.”

“From Schrö-senpai?”

“Yup. Said ‘Live’.”

“Doesn’t mean much if you’re just copying something from Princess Mono*oke!”

That’s our Schrödinger-san for you, she’s unparalleled beneath the heavens. Also, ‘live’? A few more words wouldn’t have hurt, okay.

“Finally, a few more words from me.” Masamune took a deep breath, and continued. “If you lose, I won’t ever forgive you.”

“.....”

Um, Masamune-san, couldn’t you have chosen...you know, a few kinder words than that?

“Is that what you’re gonna tell me? Really?”

“Huh? You’re going to fight someone, you know? Why would I try to be sweet now?”

“I mean, you’re not wrong, but...you won’t forgive me? Really?”

“Then let me say it again, stupid chicken. If you lose, I’ll finish you off.”

“That’s even worse!”

You’re making me wanna cry, okay. I think this nasty rabbit is much

scarier than the old man, alright.

“No problem, you just have to win.”

“Well, I don’t plan on losing, that’s for sure.”

“Not to mention...you chose Subaru-sama, not us, so you have to make her happy.”

“...Yeah, thanks, Masamune.”

“Wha...you don’t need to thank me! I wasn’t trying to be nice or anything...!”

“I know I know, Usamin.”

“~~~~!? Don’t call me Usamin as well, you stupid chicken!” The heel of her boot slammed right into my back.

Wah, she actually kicked me right before the fight. Well, that’s just like her, I guess. She’s probably worried about me in her own way. So, I have to respond to those feelings. After all, we’re friends.

“Fufu, you seem to be in full spirits, Jirou-kun.”

After I got back up on my feet again, Suzutsuki stood in front of me. Naturally, she smiled at me like she always would... Right, at least she would be kind to me...

“Jirou-kun.” She whispered into my ear. “If you lose today, I’ll tell Subaru about the time we spend in bed together on the day of the opening ceremony.”

“.....”

Let me take it back, she’s a sadist after all.

“Hey, Suzutsuki, we didn’t even spend anything together back then.”

“Eh? What are you talking about? You were entranced by my naked appearance, right?”

“Hell no.”

“Well, once you’ll be my butler, you’ll get to see that sight forever and ever.”

“Seriously!?” I threw in a retort.

Seeing me like that, Suzutsuki let out a snicker, and said ‘My, do you want to see me naked that badly?’ with a grin.

...D-Damn it, I got pulled along by her nonsense.

“Well, if you win, I wouldn’t mind thinking about some bonus for you, so do your best.”

“...Heh, I guess I can try a bit harder for my future employer.”

“Eh? What are you talking about? I won’t be your employer, but master.”

“You’re really trying to emphasize that, huh!”

Will I really be okay? I don’t see anything good coming from becoming the butler of such a sadistic woman.

“.....”

Well, it’s all a matter of me getting used to it. I don’t dislike this kind of ruckus.

“Then, I’ll be going, Suzutsuki.”

“Yes...Stay safe, Jirou-kun.” With these words, she saw me off.

And then...

“Yo, old man.” I faced the guy standing in the middle of the grass—Konoe Nagare.

He’s the individual I have to beat and overcome today.

“Shitty brat. Let me tell you one thing.” There, he sent me a sharp gaze. “I’m pretty serious today.”

“I can tell.”

“No, you can’t. My motivation is pulsing inside of me. Especially because you’re getting cheered on by all those ladies.”

“You’re just jealous then!”

“S-Shut up. I’m not jealous. Also, I have somebody cheering me on as well.”

“Huh, good for you.”

“Yeah, they said ‘If you take it easy, you won’t get dinner for a week’, actually.”

“.....”

I mean, can you really call that support? Also, that has to be from Ichigo-san, right? She’s a maid for the Suzutsuki Family, and can’t stand me, so of course she’d use every chance to push me away.

“That’s why you don’t have to worry about anything, I was never planning on holding back.”

“.....”

That sight, that speech of his was overwhelming. I was reminded of the scenery back at the leisure land. I couldn’t hit him once, and was utterly defeated by him. The memories, the pain, the sense of defeat, it all came gushing back to me.

“...Jirou.”

There, I heard a translucent voice. It’s Konoe Subaru. I reflexively turned around, but...

“Mmnn!?”

Suddenly, a soft sensation was pressed on my lips—She kissed me.

“Y-You! What are you doing!?” The second she moved her lips away, I screamed.

Why is she kissing me now? I mean, it helped in erasing all the tension in my body because of the old man, but still...

“D-Don’t worry, this is my strategy.” She blushed, and told me. “Strategy...What do you mean?”

“You know, Dad will probably be boiling because of this kiss, and won’t be able to think rationally. You have to use that opening, Jirou.”

“.....”

Sorry, Konoe, I think you were trying hard to think of that plan, but I’m pretty sure it just had the opposite effect. Look at him, he’s glaring at me like crazy. I wouldn’t be surprised if he came to knock me out in one hit. I think you just boosted his ATK.

“Also, there is one thing I wanted to tell you...” She blushed even more aggressively, and looked directly at me. “I...love you, Jirou!”

“.....”

...Ahh...Whatever. Just because of Konoe’s words, I feel like I can move mountains. Of course, that probably acted as a buff for the old man as well, but I just have to overcome even that. I mean, if the girl you like tells you that...there’s no way I can lose.

“...Yeah, I love you as well.” I properly responded.

After that, I took a deep breath, and faced forwards—forming a fist. Before the fight begins, let me confirm this one last time. I know I shouldn’t be saying this, but I’m not good at fighting like Kureha. Best I can do are normal blows. My fighting method is simple. Slip into close range, and beat up the other person. In other words, it’s a matter of my fist connecting or not—

“You...shitty brat.”

However, the old man interrupted my thoughts, and walked towards me on faint steps. And then, once he reached the space in front of me, he stopped. He reached the perfect distance for us to beat each other up with our fists.

“...Haha.” I let out a wry laugh.

It seems like he’s intending on making this a head-on battle, no tricks used. He plans on facing me like this, and beating me up with raw strength. For that intent alone, he now stands in front of me.

“—Fine by me.” I muttered, and smiled.

I don’t plan on rejecting this kind invitation.

“.....”

And then, the trial began. The battle that would decide our future...



♀ × ♂

The first to connect a hit was me, I think. However, the old man's fist rammed into my face right after. That was probably the signal to start. From there on out, we simply continued to throw fists at the other. However...I'm not the oldest son of the Sakamachi Family for nothing. Both Mom and Kureha have been training me for years, almost ten years at this point. I was at least confident in my

endurance, so I was sure I wouldn't go down that easily. However...

"What's wrong, shitty brat."

After several blows hitting both sides...Blood came spurting out of the old man's lips, as he spoke up with a calm expression.

"...Damn...it...!" I was gasping for her, tightly forming fists with as much strength as I could.

However, my fists wouldn't go up as quickly as they went down. Without trying to exaggerate, it felt like my bones were splitting in pain. It was like I'd collapse at any moment if I relaxed, and the inside of my mouth tasted like metal...And yet.

"Can't even return punches anymore? Bad luck, I won't wait."

"...!?"

As a tornado of fists rained down on me, the old man continued his words.

"What's up, huh? Weren't you trained by your family, shitty brat?"

"....."

"I thought you couldn't lose for the sake of everybody supporting you?"

"....."

"Weren't you going to become the butler of the Suzutsuki Family?"

"..."

"Weren't you...weren't you...Weren't you going to make my daughter happy?!"

"...!"

—Yeah, of course. It's just as this old fart said. I made up my mind, which is why I proposed to Konoe during the opening ceremony. I decided to become a butler for the Suzutsuki Family. However...that

was just weak, and fragile determination. After all, I'm only a second-year in high school. No way would some determination during that time account for anything. Things don't always go your way in life. There's bound to be suffering up ahead, and a brat like me wouldn't know about it. But...

“—So what about that!?” I muttered, and put more strength into my knees.

That's right. No matter how weak and fragile of a determination it may be, I've decided. I will become Suzutsuki's butler, and I will be with Konoe. I'll protect her. That's why I just have to make this fake determination real. And for that...

“...Ugh!?”

There, I heard a sound like something cracking. At the same time, the old man's expression was distorted in anguish. Reflected in his eyes... was the right hand he just punched me with.

“...Haha.” Because of this, my bleeding lips formed a provocative smile.

It's simple, really. Right now, Konoe Nagare just swung his fist down at me. In that one moment, I pushed my forehead against it, countering it with a headbutt.

“Yeah, you're totally right, as always...!” I said.

That's the main reason I get to stand here now.

“My body is pretty sturdy, right? I've been trained by my mother and little sister for the past ten years...!”

“.....”

“Of course, I can't lose now. Kureha, Masamune, Suzutsuki...they all came here to support me...”

“.....”

“There's another reason I can't lose. I've decided to become the butler

of the Suzutsuki Family...and then...and then...I'll make Konoe happy...!"

That's right, in order to change this weak and fragile determination into something real—all I have to do is win. I can only win against the old man here. Win, and then prove that my determination is genuine...!

"Urk...Gah...!" Standing on quivering legs, I put more strength into my fist.

This...is probably my last one...My body is in tatters. I can only muster up one more proper punch...so I'll put my everything into it. Even if I eat a counter like before...even if my fist breaks...I don't care. If I'm scared now, I won't be able to win. After all, I'm a chicken bastard...Or, a sheep even. I'm a sheep cornered by the big bad wolf, cornered by Konoe Nagare. That's our position right now. But, even so...

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" I screamed in order to let out the last ounce of energy I had, and formed a fist.

Naturally, it was only aimed at Konoe Nagare. Just like me, he was on his last breath. Sure enough, my punches must have worn him down. His lips were bloody and swollen, his face full of bruises, his butler uniform in tatters with red spots all over, and yet his facial expression was calm, simply focussing on the battle.

"....."

That moment, I heard the words he previously told me, beneath the winter sky.

'If you want something, grasp it with your own hands.'

That's why...

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Fine by me, I'll grasp this victory with my own fist!

"....."

And then, my fist slammed into Konoe Nagare. Immediately, my body fell over, once again reminding me that my body had reached its limit, giving in to gravity.

“...Ah.”

That moment, I saw the girls who had supported me all this time: Sakamachi Kureha, Usami Masamune, Suzutsuki Kanade, and...

“...Jirou!”

Right before my body hit the ground, I heard an alto voice. And then, what my eyes last saw...was Konoe Subaru—the girl who had given up her own dream only to be together with me.

1 A special move originating from Kinnikuman

Chapter 7: Konoe Subaru

“—Good morning, Kanade-ojousama.”

March 14th, in the middle of Spring break, I uttered the same usual phrase, as I knocked on her door.

“Good morning, Jirou-kun.”

Immediately after, the door opened, and the single daughter of Rouran Academy’s board chairman—Suzutsuki Kanade appeared, wearing her school uniform.

“Kanade-ojousama, have you gotten some good rest last night?”

“.....”

I tried speaking with as much of a polite tone as possible, to which the girl let out a long sigh.

“...Disgusting.”

“Hm? Have you yet to recover? If so, then we should take you to a hospital...”

“Not that. I really can’t sit still when you’re using such polite language towards me.”

“Even if you say that...”

“That being the case, this is an order, Jirou-kun.” She pushed her fingertip on my chest. “Drop the polite language right away.”

“Kanade-ojousama, I am dubious if I could listen to such an order as your butler...”

“Kyaaaa! Save me, Ichigo! Jirou-kun is using his position as a butler to do lewd things to his master!”

“...!” Alright! I get it already, so shut up, Suzutsuki!”

“Ah, no...Jirou-kun...you can't...you're so good...”

“Don't make up for some weird acting!”

I was starting to fear for my life, so I returned to my usual tone, and threw in a retort. Damn Devil Suzutsuki. Making my life hell immediately. Does she want to kill off her own butler that badly?

“Fufu, that fits you much better.”

“Really now? Also, can't you get used to it already? It's been two months since I started working as your butler.”

“Butler? What are you talking about, Mr. Trainee?” Suzutsuki let out a snicker.

Damn it...I can't argue back at all. I mean, she probably said that on purpose exactly because of that. That's right, I'm a butler apprentice. Right now, that's my job.

“Also, stop trying to call Ichigo-san over immediately.”

“My, why is that?”

“She's going to kill me for good.”

Imagine that Suzutsuki Fanatic suddenly hearing an SOS from Suzutsuki. She'd probably do a public execution. Of course, the victim is me.

“I'm sorry.” However, Suzutsuki stuck out her tongue in a cute fashion. “Seems like it's too late.”

“.....”

That moment, I reflexively raised my arms. Immediately after, a cold object was pressed against my neck—A chainsaw. I mean, apparently it's a dull chainsaw, but there's only one person who would use this weapon.

“Trainee-san.” A robotic voice spoke up from behind my back.

I carefully turned around, spotting a familiar girl wearing an eye patch with a maid uniform—Saotome Ichigo.

“I just heard an SOS coming from Kanade-ojousama.”

“M-Maybe that was just your imagination?”

“It sounded like ‘Ah, no...Jirou-kun...you can’t...you should have Ichigo join us...!’ though?”

“That was clearly just your hallucination going crazy!”

“That’s right. It’ll be us three...Hm? Wait a second, if I remove Trainee-san now, it’ll be just me and Kanade-ojousama...”

“Um, Ichigo-san? You’re scaring me, so could you please put your chainsaw away?”

“NO. Today is a good day to use it.”

“What kind of day?”

“Trash collection day.”

“.....”

Shockingly enough, Ichigo-san’s eyes were awfully serious. Is this power harassment? No, this is clearly threatening at this point. Since I didn’t want to be thrown into the trash just yet, I tried to explain myself.

“C-Calm down. Why don’t we call another servant over and ask for their opinion?”

“Another servant?”

“Yes, to guarantee equality.”

“YES. Now that you say it, the chef said ‘Can you bring me some ingredients for the fried chicken I’ll make this noon’.”

“There’s really no normal people living here, huh!”

By the way, the chef's name is Samejima Kosame. Yankee, deviant, lolicon, all these words described that pervert of a cook. Also, fried chicken? She's clearly talking about me, right? Who is she, Le*tor? I don't like these kinds of black jokes.

"Yes yes, stop the fighting, you two. Ichigo, you're helping with preparations for breakfast, right? Please take care of that."

"YES. Understood, Kanade-ojousama." Showing a polite bow, Ichigo-san walked away.

Terrifyingly enough, it's been like this about every single morning since I came here. Even my habit of being unable to get up in the morning was fixed after two months. If I overslept, Ichigo-san would come punish me. She would say 'Odd Jobs-san, I have 120 ways of punishing you, which one would you like?', which completely took all the sleepiness from me.

"Now then, we should head over to the dining room."

"Understood, Kanade-ojousama."

"Polite language again? Well, hearing Kanade-ojousama from you doesn't sound that bad...but it's also making me feel ticklish."

"Your personality is quite the spectacle, Kanade-ojousama."

"Fufu, of course? I am your master after all. Now, let's go, Jirou-kun." She said, and started walking down the hallway.

A second later, I followed after her. Well, that's how my day as a butler apprentice always begins.

♀ × ♂

The reason I didn't become a butler but simply an apprentice is because of my fight with the old man. That fight—ended in a draw. According to what Konoe told me, I managed to knock out the old man with my last punch, but collapsed at the same time, so it was a double knockdown.

Well, simply managing to knock down the old man is like a miracle.

After all, all my memories got knocked out of me. But, I'll take it. However, that doesn't mean that all problems are perfectly resolved. That being the case, I was given a half-baked position of being a butler apprentice. So that I could become a proper butler, I will be practicing here, or so I was told.

Well, I don't mind that at all. Even if I won against the old man, I would have still been an amateur. That's why, learning first won't hurt me. Thus, I've been living here ever since, learning as a butler while still attending school. And right now, it's spring break. So, as all the other students were enjoying their school-free days, I was...

"Still quite a way off, Jirou-kun. Still can't compare to Subaru's tea."

It was currently 9pm in the evening. As the chandelier above illuminated the luxurious room, I spoke up to Suzutsuki, who took a sip of the tea I just brewed.

"Urk...I'm sorry."

"Well, it can't be helped, you're still in training after all. Honestly speaking, the fact that you managed to score a draw with Nagare is exceptional."

"...Yeah, I'm sure I was lucky."

That day, I managed to knock down the old man. According to Kureha, he should have been strong enough to rival Mom. That's why, holding my ground against him is like a miracle itself...

"What are you talking about, Jirou-kun."

However...Suzutsuki spoke like I was joking around.

"The reason you managed to score a draw with Nagare—is because of your true strength."

"Huh? You don't need to be polite or anything. I mean, I did get stronger, but still..."

"No, that's not it. You didn't rely on luck, your strength is what defeated Nagare. After that trial...when I asked Nagare and Kureha-

chan, the doubt I had on the final day of summer break was finally resolved.”

“Doubt?”

“That’s right. ‘Why did Nagare ignore my orders back during the leisure land incident?’, remember? Like I told you before at the Shrine, I ordered him not to hurt you.”

“Seems like it. It’s because he can’t stand me, right?”

Hate for someone similar to you—it’s because he’s seeing the young himself in me. That’s why he put more strength into his fists...

“You’re wrong. That’s because Nagare had to take you seriously. Remember? Back in April during the leisure land incident, you hit Nagare once.”

“Yeah, sure.”

But, that didn’t have any impact on the old man, and he immediately beat me up after that.

“That’s right. That one hit—hurt him quite badly.”

“...What?” I looked at Suzutsuki in confusion.

“You still don’t get it? Basically, your attack back then struck Nagare quite well. It landed right in his stomach, yes? He apparently felt strong pain from that hit. He might have even gotten scared.”

“Scared...are you serious?”

“Indeed. That’s why he ignored my order, and beat you up for good. If not, he feared that he might lose. Since his goal was to help Subaru get over her fear of knives, he could not afford to lose against you.”

“...But, it didn’t look like my punch had any effect on him. He simply laughed like a picture book villain.”

“You really have an awful memory, Jirou-kun. Remember, the voice you were hearing during that incident was me, Suzutsuki Kanade.

That's what I explained when you were recovering in my residence. That's why that villain you were fighting always sounded so calm and relaxed."

"....."

So basically, is that it? I always had the strength to actually fight the old man?

"But, that makes no sense. I never managed to win against Kureha."

"You're right. After that incident at the leisure land, you would always fight and train with Kureha-chan and Subaru, right? But, you couldn't win against them. A while ago, I heard the answer from Kureha-chan."

"Answer?"

"Yes. This is probably your weakness—You can't go all out against girls."

"....."

No no no. Even if you suddenly tell me that.

"Stop joking around. I was always serious. If not, I would have been killed by Kureha."

"But, Kureha-chan wasn't feeling that way. She told me 'Nii-san generally holds back when he's fighting me or Mom'."

"Wha..."

There's no way that's true—I wanted to retort, but I remembered the words Kureha told me during my special training.

'You can't give up! You still haven't gotten fully serious!'

That's what Kureha told me. In other words...

"You weren't fully serious when it came to Kureha-chan. However, it sure sounds weird. You're the eldest son of the Sakamachi Family,

you've been training for over ten years now, so you should be able to have an equal battle with your little sister?"

"Well, you're not wrong..."

"On top of that, you couldn't go all out against Konoe either, as you're friends. Or, it was because you saw her as a girl, and thus couldn't go all out." Suzutsuki took a sip from the tea. "Basically, you're a feminist bastard who can't go all out when fighting a girl."

"...Did you have to phrase it that way?"

"Then, should I call you a kind person who subconsciously holds back against girls?"

"Urk...that also sounds awfully embarrassing..."

Still, not being able to become serious against girls, huh? No idea why things turned out that way, but...I can somewhat imagine. It probably happened when my old man died. Back then, I was the only man at home. As a result of that, I had to always protect Mom and Kureha—or I thought I had to at least. That's why I probably never went all out against them. Eventually, that most likely was projected onto other girls as well...

"That's why, the reason you managed to grasp your current position is because of your actual skill. You've been through several years of training...so your efforts have paid off."

"....."

"These efforts finally showed in your battle with Nagare. Well, there's still a difference of skill between the two of you—but, you achieved a draw. That's all because you bet your life on the line, maybe?"

"...No, it wasn't just my strength alone."

It's because I had all of them with me—Kureha, Masamune, Suzutsuki, and Konoe. Because they watched over me, I became stronger in my desire not to lose. Even Schrö-senpai and Nakuru gave me supportive messages. Well, that makes it sound like I was just trying to act tough, but...oh well.

“Fufu, you don’t have to be so modest.” Suzutsuki said with an oddly serious tone. “After all, you did something I couldn’t.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“It’s simple. Back in December, when you got hurt with the knife from Ichigo. You went to the hospital, whereas Subaru, Usami, and I were talking things out, and about our feelings for you.”

“.....”

“Honestly speaking, I gave up. I was thinking ‘Maybe nobody here can become happy’. After all, this is reality we’re talking about...so I gave up.”

“.....”

“But, Jirou-kun, you were different. You proposed to Subaru in front of everyone. You tried to change the ending. You knew that reality wasn’t so kind, but you still fought it.”

“.....”

“Eventually, you beat Nagare, and became a butler apprentice. You inherited Subaru’s dream, and changed the ending. That is something I couldn’t do—That’s why I’m happy that you became my butler.” She spoke with a proud tone.

She called me her butler.

“Well, as for what I’m trying to say...you should work hard to make me happy. And, become happy yourself. That way, I can become happy, and get over the shock of being rejected.”

“Yeah, I can’t really say it too well, but that’s much like you.”

“Fufu, thank you. Well, it’s true that Usami-san and I were hurt being rejected by you. So is Subaru, who threw her dream away. You must feel guilty having rejected us. In the end, we’ve all been hurt...But even so.” She faintly smiled. “Even getting hurt...is important.”

“Eh...”

“From what I heard, there’s theatre plays with several Cinderellas, and obstacle races at sports events allow all participants of a group to pass the goal at the same time. It sounds unbelievable, but the parents tell the teachers ‘My child would get hurt if they lost, don’t you feel bad?’.”

“Well, every parent simply cares for their child.”

“But...I think that the experience of failing and getting hurt, being forced to get up again, is something that every person needs. After all...it’s impossible to never get hurt in life. That’s why...thank you. You may have rejected my confession...but at the same time, you took me and my feelings seriously. Of course, I was sad that my love could never come to fruition, and it hurt me. But even so...I have to get up again. Become stronger than I was before, and move forward.” She said with a clear tone, and smiled.

That’s right, her name is Suzutsuki Kanade, and that’s her style of living. No matter how unreasonable life may be, she will get up again and grasp her own happiness. This kind of lifestyle is...

“By the way, Jirou-kun, have you gotten used to your life here?” She suddenly changed the topic.

This time, she smiled for a different reason...Damn it, this sadist. She shows my answer.

“Not at all. There’s many things I have to remember, many jobs I have to do...and then there’s also the other.....quirky servants.”

“Are you talking about Ichigo or Kosame? Yeah, it will probably take some time until they accept you being here. So, you just have to work harder to make them accept you.”

“I know that.”

“Fufu, that’s my butler, alright. That reminds me, have you gotten closer with Mayoi-chan?”

“Yeah, she’s a great person.”

Hinata Mayoi—another maid here at this residence. She’s one year

younger than me, and was accepted here as a maid through complicated circumstances.....I wonder why, we sure get along. She has this conflicted aura that I see myself in.

“Well, she’s been through a lot.”

“A lot?”

“It would take around two manga volumes to explain her episode.”

“That really is a lot, holy smokes.”

“But, she was really attached to Subaru, so hearing about your marriage with her was quite the shock.”

“Yeah, I could tell...”

The first time I met her, she screamed ‘Please take care of Subaru-sama!’. To think there are Konoe fans even within the servants here. Subaru-sama is no joke, really.

“It’s fine, Mayoi-chan is a strong girl, so she’ll be able to stand up again.”

“I agree. How do I say this, she resembles Kureha a bit. She can surely get up again.”

“That reminds me, how is Kureha-chan doing?”

“Same as always. Rather, it feels like she’s become even more powerful.”

Sakamachi Kureha has been living back in the rebuilt Sakamachi Household—together with Mom. Mom came back home last month from her trip overseas that lasted a year and a half. She apparently is going to use the fight money she earned to make a fighting dojo.

“.....”

...No, I know. Her ultimate goal is to raise someone who can rival her. I heard she’s been unrivaled during her trip overseas, so her only chance at some kind of thrill is to raise her ultimate sparring partner.

“I feel a bit bad for Kureha-chan. I basically stole you from her, as you don’t live with her anymore.”

“Well, she said something along the lines of ‘I need to learn how to live without Nii-san myself!’, so I think she’ll be fine. Not to mention that we still live in the same town, so it’s not as if we won’t ever see each other again.”

By the way, she’ll become the new captain of the handicrafts club once the new school year rolls around, or so I’ve heard. After all, Schrö-senpai and Ichigo-san will graduate. Luckily, Kureha seems motivated enough. I just hope that our handicrafts club doesn’t turn into some military unit.

“...Oh yeah, is Masamune okay?” I muttered that question.

Normally, it was Masamune’s turn to become the club president, but as she’s busy with her part-time job, she rejected that. Because she cut her ties with her family, she’s trying harder this year with work. That’s why we haven’t met much recently, but...

“Oh yeah, I wanted to talk about you in regards to her.”

“Eh?”

What do you mean—is what I wanted to ask, but Suzutsuki immediately continued, saying “You can come in now”, calling out to the living room door. Slowly, it opened, and the person who entered was—

“.....Good morning, stupid chicken.”

It was Usami Masamune, undoubtedly. However, I was baffled at her appearance more than anything.

“What are you wearing?”

“~~~! T-This is...”

Indeed, Masamune desperately pulled down her cute skirt full of frills—a maid uniform. It’s the very uniform she is usually wearing while working at the maid cafe, her part-time job. Yet for some reason, she

came here wearing that. Did she awaken to her cosplaying interests?

“Jirou-kun, let me give you a simple explanation.” There, Suzutsuki Kanade opened her mouth, seeming unable to hold back her excitement. “Starting today, Usami-san will be living in this residence.”

“.....”

My brain froze up. W-Wait a second, so basically...

“Will she...become a servant here?”

“Exactly. Well, you should probably hear the details from Usami-san herself.” Suzutsuki smiled.

Waaah, this definitely is going to end badly. What was she planning now...

“M-Masamune, did something happen?” I asked the girl with a quivering voice.

To that, Masamune stuttered a moment, showing a vague smile.

“W-Well...I was kicked out of the flat.”

“What?”

“As I said, I was thrown out, so I have no other place to live.”

“.....”

S-She’s a lost child? I know she’s poor, but that’s taking things a bit too far. Why was she kicked out anyway?

“Stupid chicken, do you remember why I was living in that flat?”

“Eh? Because it was like a haunted property, and...Ah.”

That’s right. It was like a haunted flat, which is why the rent was exceptionally cheap at like 40,000 yen a month. However, that’s a story of the past. Ever since Kureha and I lived there, the supernatural events have come to an end, and the ghost haunting the

place (Sakamoto-san) has been exorcised by Kureha with a German suplex.

“Come on, remember the hole Subaru-sama and Suzutsuki Kanade made to connect their flat to ours? The owner and worker came over last month...and that’s when they found out that the place isn’t haunted anymore.”

“.....”

“Naturally, the price went back to normal, but I can’t afford that. That’s why they kicked me out.”

“.....”

S-So unreasonable. To think misfortune would happen after the ghost has been exorcised.

“W-Were you okay?”

“Of course not. I was working part-time, but it wasn’t enough money.”

“Well, that does make sense.”

She can’t ask her parents for money either, not after everything that happened before. Rather, they might just ask her for money instead as reparation.

“That’s why...I stayed at the maid cafe for a while, and then slept at Nakuru’s place and your home while searching for a new place...But I don’t have any guardians, and not enough money to afford any proper place to live at...”

“Thus, Usamin came to ask me for help.”

“Shut up! Don’t call me Usamin!”

“Don’t scream like that. I asked my father to employ you here, remember?”

“Urk...I am thankful for that, but...”

“Still, as I thought, a maid uniform looks best on you, Usamin.”

“Don’t call me Usamiiiiiiin!” Masamune threw in a retort, gasping for air.

Will she be okay? I’m worried she might collapse from all the retorting.

“Hey, Masamune, are you serious about becoming a maid here?” I asked, trying to confirm Masamune’s feelings.

To that, Masamune puffed out her chest.

“Of course? Listen, stupid chicken, I chose to be here not because I had no other place to go to.”

“What do you mean?”

“Huh? You still don’t get it?” Masamune shook her head in disbelief. “I mean, we’re currently in a job drought, right?”

“.....”

Masamune-san, why are you bringing up such a realistic problem right now?

“That’s why I chose this situation to find myself a proper job.”

“It sounds so believable despite being all over the place...”

“Of course? I was planning on working right after graduating from high school, so now I can work here immediately. According to Suzutsuki Kanade, I’m allowed to attend school while working here. On top of that, I get food and a place to sleep, and the pay is great!” Masamune smiled.

...I wonder, she really thought this through. She’s like a dandelion blooming through the asphalt. She could probably survive everywhere.

“Also...” Masamune showed a somewhat bashful reaction. “Working here...I can live with everyone.”

“Masamune...”

“Ah, don’t get the wrong idea! It’s not like I was feeling lonely or anything! It’s just...living together with everyone last December... was fun...” She spoke with a voice about to disappear.

...For crying out loud, she really can never be honest. But, Suzutsuki said it. ‘The people of my residence are like family’. If so, then it’s like we’re a big family, and that’s probably the best environment to offer for Masamune. After all, it’s what she’s been looking for.



“That being the case, I’ll be working here starting today, stupid chicken.”

“Yeah, let’s get along, Usamin.”

“Why are calling me that way now too, stupid chicken!?”

“Fufu, you don’t need to get so angry, I think it’s adorable.”

“E-Eh, really?”

“Yeah, it makes you sound like a pet.”

“Are you making fun of me!?”

Master and maid already got into a bit of banter. Well, I’m happy that she’s here. I don’t think I could deal with that sadistic rich lady’s pranks on my own. I’ll have Masamune do that now. I’m counting on you, Usamin.

“Ah, that’s right.” Masamune seemingly remembered something, as she spoke up. “Where is Subaru-sama? I haven’t seen her yet.”

“.....”

Suzutsuki went silent. For a brief moment, no sound was heard in the room.

“She’s not here.” Suzutsuki declared.

“Eh? Not here...What do you mean?”

“Exactly how I said it. Now that Jirou-kun has become my butler, she has no place to stay here. That’s why she went to where her mother’s family lives.”

“Wha...” Masamune froze up.

That’s right...Konoe doesn’t live here. She’s living with the Takanashi Family. After all, she’s not a butler anymore.

“T-That’s a lie. Just when I thought we could live together...”

“Masamune...” I opened my mouth, about to call out to the girl who was close to breaking out in tears, when...

“I’ve returned, my lady.” A familiar alto voice reverberated.

Standing there was Konoe Subaru, the former butler of the Suzutsuki Family.

“Welcome back, Subaru.” Suzutsuki greeted her like it was nothing.

Seeing her, Masamune was baffled, and took a few seconds to process this information.

“...Suzutsuki Kanade, were you...”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think you would believe my lie of Subaru being gone.”

“You lying weeeeeeeench!”

“But, I wasn’t lying? It’s true that Subaru went back to her mother’s family. Right, Subaru? How was the grave visit?”

“Perfect thanks to you.” Konoe nodded with a bright expression.

That’s right...for the past few days, Konoe was away, visiting her mother’s grave. Basically, she went to the same location we had visited last summer break. She apparently wanted to tell her mother about what happened these past few days. That’s why she took some time off work, and came back like this...

“It’s been a while, Kanade-ojousama.” Now, a husky voice spoke up.

Konoe Nagare appeared behind Konoe. Just like Konoe, he had taken a few days off.

“Thank you very much for everything. To think you would allow us a break like that.”

“Don’t worry about it. A grave visit is an important event for you two, so of course you and Subaru both should be able to go.”

“Still, letting us go on a trip...”

“It’s fine, you should get to spend some time as a family.”

“...Indeed. Thank you very much, Kanade-ojousama.” The old man showed a deep bow.

Hm, that’s a butler for you, he perfectly gets his attitude and moves down. That’s to be expected from a butler of the Suzutsuki Family, I’d say...

“Hm?”

There, the old man gave me a dubious gaze.

“I was wondering who that kiddo with glasses was, but it’s the shitty brat? You still haven’t gotten fired?”

“.....”

Let me correct that, the second he uses such foul language in front of his master, he’s questionable as a butler.

“Shut up. You’re back now, so do your damn work.”

Over these past few days while he was gone, work has practically been hell with everything being pushed onto me. Well, I agree that their trip together was important, and I’m sure they had a lot of things to talk about.

“Hmpf, I don’t want to hear that from you. I’m a butler of the Suzutsuki Family, so you have to catch up with me. You can’t stay an apprentice forever.”

“Really now? Are you sure about that? You were the one who said that if I became a fully-fledged butler, you would allow me to marry Konoe, right?”

“...Ah.” The old man seemed to have remembered, as he pressed his fingers on his forehead with a groan.

It’s exactly as I said. After my fight with the old man, that’s what he said. It’s the condition to marry Konoe. Once I become a fully-fledged and commendable butler, I get the permission. Basically, our current idea is to date with marriage in mind.

“I take back what I said, you should stay an apprentice forever.”

“Hell no. I’ll show you, old man.”

“Heh, go and try, shitty brat.”

After we both threw insults at each other, the old man gave a brief

“Then, if you would excuse me, Kanade-ojousama’, and left the room. He’s probably off to work. He might have a nasty personality, but he takes work pretty seriously at least. That being said...

“Hm? What’s wrong, Jirou?”

Konoe must have felt awkward because I was practically staring at her, tilting her head. I mean, how do I say this...

“You really are cute.”

“Wha...W-W-W-Where did that come from!?”

“I mean, I’ve always seen you wearing male butler clothes, so seeing you like that made me realize that even more.”

“Urk...You think so?” Konoe blushed, and looked down at her own clothes.

Namely, she was wearing a maid uniform. Specifically, the one tailored for the Suzutsuki Family.

“Um...since she’s wearing this...that means that Subaru-sama is a maid at the Suzutsuki Family?” Masamune asked.

Oh yeah, since Masamune only recently became a maid, she had no idea. Well, I was also surprised at first.

“...Yeah. I quit as a butler after all. But, if I work as a maid, I can still stay here...and live in this residence. That’s what my lady said.”

“But, Subaru, you don’t have to keep up your tone like that. Just call me ‘Kana-chan’ again like you did before.”

“I-I can’t do that, my lady! I am simply a beginner as a maid! That’s why, calling you that in front of everyone is...”

“Then you’ll call me that way if it’s just the two of us?”

“I-If so, then maybe...” The maid blushed, faintly nodding.

Hmmm, as I thought, a maid uniform really looks great on Konoe,

alright. I'm still not fully used to seeing Konoe with her hair down. As she felt guilty for stealing the love interest of her master, she decided to quit as a butler. Right now, I'm taking over her dream to become a butler, trying to grant it for her. At the same time, she focuses on her dream to become a maid. If we both manage to achieve our dreams, we can always be together—

“By the way, Jirou, were you properly doing your work while I wasn't here?”

Crap, she's far too cute. She's my girlfriend, you know. Not to mention that she probably never would have been able to say that before, but she really managed to change.

“.....”

Thinking about it, it's been a long yet equally short year. But even so, we all changed to become someone better. This year, I managed to overcome my gynophobia. I've met some crazy people, and experienced all sorts of things. All of that changed me. Sometimes I was lost, and scared like the chicken bastard that I am, but I still changed. I managed to change...

“Are you sure about flirting around like that? You're my butler, so I'd appreciate you actually working. And, I hope you can help in making things exciting, Jirou-kun.” Suzutsuki Kanade said, smiling.

She's the girl that now became my master.

“For crying out loud...Also, since we'll both be living here starting today...I'm asking you to take care of me, stupid chicken.” Usami Masamune looked at me, clearly excited about the future.

She's the girl I lived with for almost a month, someone who became my family.

“...Alright, let's do our best with our work. I need to become a professional maid as quickly as possible. Right, Jirou?” Finally, Konoe Subaru called out my name, as her long hair shook.

She's the girl who wished to always be with me.

“...Yeah, you’re right.” I answered all of them.

That’s right, for their sake as well, I have to try my best today. That’s my chicken bastard style. Also, even if I skipped out on work, I’ll get scolded immediately. They’re pretty scary folks if you make them angry after all. Seriously, why are there only scary girls around me. Such a waste of cute looks.

“.....”

Yeah, girls are scary. Because of the gynophobia I had, I can declare that, and from a boy’s point of view, girls can be terrifying. All of these girls are quirky and unique in their own way. When I’m with them, everything turns chaotic and fun, and I’ll surely be wrapped up in even more trouble from now on. Honestly speaking, I feel a bit nervous in regards to that. But even so...

“.....”

Even so—I love all of them. That’s probably the one answer I reached over this year. Back when I first came to this residence in April, I could only think that girls are scary. But now, I’m different. My mindset has changed.

“Ah, that reminds me, Jirou.” There, Konoe Subaru opened her mouth.

As her apron dress shook, she spoke up.

“I heard that Nakuru-chan is writing a new novel.”

“Urk...Has to be about glasses again, right?”

“No, this time it seems to be different. Apparently, the novel depicts me as a girl. Before, she asked me ‘Can Nakuru write a novel with all of you as models?’ via a phone call.”

“Us as models?”

“That’s right. Nakuru-chan apparently compiled everything that happened this year. That’s why, it’s not really that much fiction? She might come interviewing all of us at one point.”

“I’m genuinely scared just thinking about that.”

“But, isn’t it fine? I want to read that story. So that I won’t ever forget what happened this past year.” She smiled.

...Well, whatever. As long as she’s smiling, nothing else matters. I think it’s a good idea, really. Fits her best, as she’s been crazy following me around and going crazy about glasses.

“.....”

This past year, we’ve gotten lost from time to time, scared like chicken bastards, and yet we still moved forward to create this special story of ours. Really, a lot happened this year. Just like the seasons are changing, and time passes on, there is nothing neverending in this world. Even so, we worked hard to acquire this happiness.

‘If you want something, grab it with your own hands.’

Just as the old man said, in the midst of this unreasonable and unfair world, we crawled along the ground, got up on injured feet...and grasped an irreplaceable happiness.

“.....”

The result of all these struggles is the daily life we have now. I think we can be proud of ourselves. We were hurt, but managed to grasp what we have right now. That’s why I don’t ever want to forget this one year. Of course, we can’t just stop here, so that we won’t lose this happiness. I want to always remember this story.

“...Subaru.” Calmly, I called out to the girl. “Did she already decide on a title?”

“...Yeah, Nakuru-chan told me.” Konoe Subaru moved her lips with a somewhat bashful expression. “—The Stray Butler and Chicken Me.”



Afterword

It's been a while! This is Asano Hajime who just finished [Mayo Chiki!].

Now then, we've reached the second half of the climax. Personally speaking, becoming a novel author has been one of my dreams ever since I was a child, now granted through [Mayo Chiki!], and the chance of being able to work with many other people was granted through this work. Of course, I also feel deep love for the characters, which is what makes it harder to let go.

But even so, as an author, I have the duty to properly finish a story I have started, so this 12th volume of [Mayo Chiki!] will be the last. I put everything I wanted into this story, so the people who are unsure of seeing the conclusion are highly urged to slam this volume down on the cash register with an elbow drop!

Now then, together with this volume, the 4th compiled manga edition of the [Mayo Chiki!] manga is on release. Even if the source material ended, the manga is still ongoing, so please check it out!

Now then, it's time to move on to my thanks. First up is my editor Shouji-sama. I've been in your care over these past three years! I will try my hardest to improve as an author, and provide even better stories, so please help me out when the time comes!

Next up is my illustrator Kikuchi Seiji-sama, who brought the characters of [Mayo Chiki!] to life. Without their illustrations, I'm sure that [Mayo Chiki!] would not have turned out the way it has. I truly feel lucky that I had such a great illustrator. Thank you very much!

Continued, the editor-in-chief Misaka-sama, everyone from the editorial department, the proofreader, designer, everyone involved with the publishing and distribution, the various light novel authors supporting me, NEET-sensei who is responsible for the comicalization, Eichi Yuu-sensei who was responsible for the spin-off

[MayoMayo!], everybody involved with the anime, and of course all my readers who sent me fan letters. Naturally, I can't forget the novel itself and the characters.

Through the help of many people, the inexperienced me managed to close the curtains on a series. Thank you very much! Becoming an author to make it my daily bread is an experience I won't ever forget. Surely, everything I've learned I will be able to use for my future series.

Now then, while hoping that I get to see all of you again, I will step on the gas in preparation for my next story, naturally no brakes involved, so I pray for your continued support.

Asano Hajime

Credits

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Table of Contents

1. [Illustration](#)
2. [Chapter 1: Sakamachi Kureha](#)
3. [Chapter 2: Narumi Sisters](#)
4. [Chapter 3: Usami Masamune](#)
5. [Chapter 4: Konoe Nagare](#)
6. [Chapter 5: Suzutsuki Kanade](#)
7. [Chapter 6: Sakamachi Kinjirou](#)
8. [Chapter 7: Konoe Subaru](#)
9. [Afterword](#)
10. [Credits](#)

Landmarks

1. [Cover](#)